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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PHOTO: PTI

BJP National President JP Nadda resigns as RS MP

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

JP Nadda, national President of BJP and representative for Himachal Pradesh in the Rajya Sabha, tendered his official resignation from his position as Rajya Sabha MP on Monday. The chairman of the Rajya Sabha has accepted his resignation. "Jagat Prakash Nadda, an elected Member of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha), representing the State of Himachal Pradesh, resigned his seat in the Rajya Sabha and his resignation has been accepted by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha w.e.f. 4th March, 2024," as per an official statement from the Rajya Sabha. Another leader, popular Bhojpuri singer Pawan Singh withdrew from the race for the Lok Sabha, a day after being named the BJP's candidate from Bengal's Asansol constituency. Taking to his official handle on X, the singer confirmed that he was pulling out of the contest "due to some reason." "I express my heartfelt gratitude to the top leadership of Bharatiya Janata Party," Singh posted from his X handle on Sunday.

—ANI

Metro Mitra launches WhatsApp booking services

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Metro Mitra has launched a WhatsApp booking service for autoriders to enhance connectivity to and from metro stations. The app is a collaborative initiative involving the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited in partnership with the Autorickshaw Drivers Union. Commuters can book auto rides by messaging 'auto' to the WhatsApp chatbot number +91 97422 51974, providing pick-up and drop-off location details. The bot then notifies the nearest drivers for booking the ride, with prices aligned with government fare meter rates plus Rs 10. Autos affiliated with Metro Mitra will have distinct stickers featuring QR codes for easy identification and access to driver information and feedback submission. Earlier during its beta release in Jayanagar, the app faced glitch due to objections from a faction of the Auto Rickshaw Drivers Union affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions regarding the union's association with Metro Mitra.

—Salar News

No immunity for MPs, MLAs taking bribe to vote, says SC

The unanimous verdict overrules 1998 judgment protecting such lawmakers

NEW DELHI, 4 MAR

MPs and MLAs taking bribes to vote or make a speech in the House are not immune from prosecution, the Supreme Court said on Monday in a landmark, unanimous verdict that overrules its 1998 judgment protecting such lawmakers.

Observing that bribery is not protected by parliamentary privileges, a seven-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice India (CJI) DY Chandrachud held that a five-judge bench's interpretation in the 1998 verdict in JMM bribery case was contrary to Articles 105 and 194 of the Constitution.

Articles 105 and 194 deal with the powers and privileges of MPs and MLAs in the Parliament and the legislative assemblies.

"Corruption and bribery by members of the legislatures erode probity in public life," the CJI, who read the operative part of the verdict, said while pronouncing the verdict today. The bench also comprised Justices AS Bopanna, MM Sundresh, PS Narasimha, JB Pardiwala, Sanjay Kumar and Manoj Misra. The bench said the power to punish for criminal wrongdoing emanates from the power of the State to prosecute offenders who violate the criminal law and it applies uniformly to everyone subject to the sanctions of the criminal law of the land.

Articles 105 and 194 deal with the powers and privileges of MPs and MLAs in the Parliament *PHOTO: PTI*

In 1998, the five-judge constitution bench held in its majority verdict on the Narasimha Rao versus CBI case that parliamentarians have immunity against criminal prosecution for any speech made and vote cast inside the House under Articles 105(2) and 194(2).

The CJI said Article 105 of the Constitution seeks to sustain an environment to have deliberations by the lawmakers in the House and this atmosphere is vitiated when a member is bribed to deliver a speech.

Justice Chandrachud said the privileges claimed must have a nexus to the collective functioning of the House and must have a relationship with the essential functions of a legislator which he or she has to discharge.

The court also said it will examine whether the immunity granted to lawmakers from prosecution for taking bribes to make a speech or vote in Parliament and state legislatures extends to them even if criminality is attached to their actions.

On 20 September, 2023, the apex court had agreed to reconsider its 1998 judgement, saying it was an important issue having a significant bearing on "morality of polity".

The issue came under the apex court's lens in 2019, when a bench headed by then Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi was hearing an appeal filed by Sita Soren, JMM MLA from Jama and daughter-in-law of party chief Shibu Soren. She was an accused in the JMM bribery scandal.

The Gogoi-led bench had referred to a five-judge bench the matter, noting it had "wide ramification" and was of "substantial public importance".

The bench also referred to international position and law on parliamentary privileges in countries like the UK, the US, Canada and Australia.

—PTI

3 held for pro-Pak slogans in Vidhana Soudha

The arrested are Iltaj, a resident of Delhi; Munawar, a resident of RT Nagar; and Mohammed Nashipudi, resident of Haveri *PHOTO: ANI*

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Three people have been arrested for allegedly raising 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogans in Vidhana Soudha corridors on 27 February.

The arrested are Iltaj, a resident of Delhi; Munawar, a resident of RT Nagar in Bengaluru; and Mohammed Shafi Nashipudi, a resident of Byadagi in Haveri district, a police officer with Vidhana Soudha station said on Monday.

Some people allegedly shouted pro-Pakistan slogans after the victory of Congress leader Syed Naseer Hussain in Rajya Sabha elections. "A total of 26 people were under the scanner for allegedly raising pro-Pakistan slogans. Seven of them were questioned and voice samples of three were sent to government-run Forensic Science Laboratory," the police officer said.

Meanwhile, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee filed a complaint against BJP State President BY Vijayendra and the BJP head of social media department for curating fake FSL reports. The complaint was filed at Cyber, Economic and Narcotics crime police station in the Bengaluru West division. As per an FSL report published in BJP's social media handle on the 'X' platform, the slogan of Naseer Saab Zindabad was changed to Pakistan Zindabad, the complaint said.

BJP posted on its social media handle an investigation report prepared by private laboratory Clue4 Evidence Forensic Investigations and signed by audio forensic examiner Phaneendar BN on behalf of City-based 'Samvada Foundation', a not-for-profit organisation allegedly linked to the RSS. In his opinion, Phaneendar said the video is "not tampered/doctored in between and is a result of a single capture." Home Minister G Parameshwara sought to know whether the private person who prepared the report had his laboratory and had done the analysis. The report of the State government's own FSL will be made public once it is submitted. "If the report says such a slogan was raised, then we will take action immediately."

BJP workers staged a protest at Town Hall on Monday against the raising of alleged pro-Pakistan slogans. IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge said, "The government should have answered, but the BJP getting the forensic report from a private institution and making it public is an anti-national act."

—Salar News/PTI

Sanatan Dharma row: SC raps Udhayanidhi

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Udhayanidhi Stalin *PHOTO: PTI*

The Supreme Court on Monday rebuked Tamil Nadu Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin over his "eradicate Sanatan dharma" remark and asked why he has moved the court with his plea for clubbing together the First Information Report (FIRs) filed against him after abusing his right to freedom of speech and expression.A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta told Stalin that being a minister he should have been careful with his statements and mindful of the possible consequences they could have."You abuse your right under Article 19(1)(a) (right to freedom of speech and expression of the Constitution). You abuse your right under Article 25 (freedom of conscience, the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate religion). "Now you are exercising your right under Article 32 (to file plea in the Supreme Court directly)? Do you not know the consequences of what you said? You are not a layman. You are a minister. You should know the consequences," the bench said and adjourned the matter till 15 March.

Speaking at a conference in September 2023, Udhayanidhi Stalin had said Sanatana dharma is against social justice and equality and should be "eradicated'. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Stalin, submitted he was not justifying his client's comments but only seeking consolidation of FIRs lodged against him over it in six states. On 22 September last year, the apex court had agreed to hear a plea by Chennai-based lawyer B Jagannath seeking registration of an FIR against Stalin and others who backed him, llikening his comments to hate speech.

—PTI

PROBE ON

3 girls suffer burn injuries in Mangaluru acid attack

MANGALURU, 4 MARCH

Three girl students suffered burn injuries after an acid attack by a youth at a government pre-university college in the taluka headquarters town of Kadaba in Dakshina Kannada district on Monday, police said.

The youth has been identified as Abin Shibi, 23, hailing from Nilambur in Malappuram district of Kerala, said a police official.

During interrogation, Shibi told police that one of the victims had spurned his amorous advances, and he took this "extreme step to show his disappointment in love."

The attacker told police officials he had targeted only the girl, who suffered third degree facial burn injuries in the attack. But the acid also spilt over the other two students who were sitting close to her, he claimed. "The two other girls have sustained minor burn injuries", a senior police officer said.

The youth has been identified as Abin Shibi, 23, hailing from Nilambur in Malappuram district of Kerala *PHOTO: PTI*

- The attacker said he had targeted only the girl, who suffered third degree facial burn injuries in the attack

"girls have been shifted to a private hospital after the incident, which took place when they were preparing for the Pre-University Course (PUC) exams sitting in the corridors of the college," the official said.

The youth, wearing a mask and cap to conceal his identity, approached them with a bottle and threw acid. Based on preliminary investigation, the police had earlier said he is from Kasaragod district of Kerala.

"The attacker wore school uniform and had gained entry into the school premises as a student and carried out the crime", the official said. "We are investigating as to who gave him the uniform".

He tried to escape after the attack but the local people who were witness to this incident chased and apprehended him and handed him over to the police.

—PTI

SBI URGES SC TO EXTEND DEADLINE TO DISCLOSE ELECTORAL BONDS INFO

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

State Bank of India (SBI) on Monday moved Supreme Court seeking an extension of time till 30 June to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties.

In its verdict last month, the top court directed the SBI to furnish the details to the poll panel by 6 March. In an application filed before the top court, SBI contended that retrieval of information from "each silo" and the procedure of matching the information of one silo to that of the other would be a time-consuming exercise.

The plea submitted that due to stringent measures undertaken to ensure that the identity of the donors was kept anonymous, "decoding' the electoral bonds and matching donors to the donations made would be a complex process.

"It submitted that the data related to the issuance of the bond and the data related to the redemption of the bond was kept recorded in two different silos. No central database was maintained.

—PTI

BATTLING WATER CRISIS

Pvt tankers to be charged as per distance covered

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Private tankers in City will be charged based on the distance they travelled from the source of water to the destination they supplied, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Monday.

Shivakumar held a meeting with Additional Chief Secretary Rakesh Singh, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Commissioner Tushar Girinath, Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewage Board Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar V and other zonal commissioners on Monday to discuss the water crisis in Bengaluru.

Shivakumar also said the government will be taking over the borewells in areas with good water tables to provide water to the dried-up borewells. The owners of the borewells will be paid the compensation, he said. "Water does not belong to anyone. Under the law, there is a provision for the government to take over water," Shivakumar said.

Government will take over borewells in areas with good water tables *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Milk tankers will be taken over

To increase the frequency of water supply, the government will use unused milk tankers to supply water. "As there is less milk production, there have been a lot of unused milk tankers and we have informed Karnataka Milk Federation that we will be taking over their tankers," Shivakumar said.

DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

The private tankers were given time till 7 March to register. However, only 219 out of 3,500 tankers in the State have been registered, the minister said. If the private tankers do not register before the deadline, RTO will seize their vehicles and licences will be cancelled, Shivakumar warned.

To solve the drinking water problem, Rs 148 crore from BBMP and Rs 128 crore from BWSSB have been allocated. The war rooms and call centres will be set up by BBMP at ward levels to solve the problems quickly. The RO plants that have been stopped due to the shortage of water will be started immediately once the source of water is found.

—Salar News

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Cafe blast probe handed over to NIA

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has handed over Bengaluru's The Rameshwaram Cafe blast probe to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which has re-registered the case and started an investigation. The case was handed over to the NIA last week following the visit of an NIA team to the blast site.

The blast took place at the cafe on 1 March in Bengaluru's Whitefield area where several people were injured following an explosion that occurred during the busy lunch hour.

Earlier, the Bengaluru Police had registered a case under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Explosives Substances Act in connection with the explosion at the cafe. The blast took place at 1 pm on 1 March and the police had also found a suspect in the CCTV footage, keeping a bag inside the cafe. The police probe so far indicated that an IED device with a timer was used to carry out the explosion. Earlier, State Home Minister G Parameshwara had assured that the suspect would be arrested soon.

Rameshwaram cafe *PHOTO: PTI*

"We are continuing our investigation. 8 teams have been formed and all are working in different directions and looking at different aspects. We have collected several CCTV footages. We are examining every angle including if there is any jealousy factor. I also appeal to the opposition to cooperate with us and not to make this a political issue...We do not know if there is any connection with the Mangaluru blast. They have used a similar material and the same system technically. Yesterday NSG arrived here. We will definitely find the person. We had a meeting yesterday and briefed the Chief Minister," the State Home Minister said on Sunday. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar echoed the State Home Minister asking the people not to panic or worry."It was a low-intensity blast. A youth came and kept a small bag which exploded after an hour. About 10 people received injuries. 7-8 teams formed to probe the incident. We are looking at all angles. I ask every resident of Bengaluru to not worry" Shivakumar had said. *—ANI*

Nothing wrong in NIA probing cafe blast: Priyank

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

IT/BT and Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Minister Priyank Kharge on Monday said that there is "nothing wrong" with the Union Home Ministry handing over the Rameshwaram Cafe blast probe to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Kharge said they are open to probe into the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case. "Whatever it is, we are open for investigation. We have a very great police team here in Karnataka. If they have given it to the NIA, there is nothing wrong in it...," Kharge told ANI on Monday. He also slammed BJP over its citing a private forensic lab report analysis that claimed that it is highly probable that 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogans were raised outside the Vidhan Souda by supporters of a winning Congress candidate. *—ANI*

Kolar police bust gang, recover gutka worth ₹3 cr

KOLAR, 4 MARCH

The district police were able to crack many crimes reported in the last few months including theft of gutka worth crores from various places in Karnataka, Kolar Superintendent of Police M Narayan said while addressing a press conference. He said that gutka worth over Rs 3 crore have been seized so far from Yettikodi village in Malur taluk. He also said the police said it has busted a gang of thieves that used to steal expensive mobile phones from Flipkart warehouses. The accused Ashok Singh, Hari Om, and Rajendra Singh hail from Rajasthan, whereas Ajay Kumar, Mohammed Ramjan from Jammu and Kashmir and Praveen Sanyadia from Madhya Pradesh. Kolar police have also recovered cash worth over Rs 6 lakhs from them and the accused have been remanded to judicial custody. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

3 of family kill themselves in Gadag

GADAG, 4 MARCH

Three members of a family in Gonal village in Karnataka killed themselves in an apparent dispute over a tractor loan. According to reports the deceased are Renuka Teli, 49, her son Manjunath Teli, 22, and Manjunath's maternal aunt Savakka Teli, 47. A dispute broke out between Renuka and Manjunath over repayment of the tractor loan. Soon after, Renuka left home and committed suicide on the railway tracks. Manjunath reportedly followed his mother and tried to save her, but in doing so, even he was hit by the train. Upon learning of the deaths, Savakka hanged herself. *—Salar News*

HC okays Rath Yatra at Ladle Mashaikh dargah

KALABURAGI, 4 MARCH

High Court bench in Kalaburagi and Dharwad have granted conditional permission for the Sri Raghava Chaitanya Rath Yatra to be held in Aland town during the Shivaratri festivities. Hindus in Aland Taluk observe Maha Shivaratri with special reverence, offering prayers to the Sivalinga at the Ladle Mashaikh dargah. This year, Hindu Jagran Vedike district coordinator Nagendra Kabade and BJP leader Harshananda Guthedar sought permission for the Rath Yatra as part of the festivities in light of previous disputes surrounding the Ladle Mashaikh dargah in Aland town, The High Court has imposed several conditions for the Rath Yatra including restrictions on the use of loudspeakers, adherence to traffic regulations, hate slogans and conclusion of the Yathra before sunset. The decision comes after the 2022 incident which saw a clash between religious communities during the Puja. *— Salar News*

State aims to be USD 1T economy by 2032: Min

MB Patil was addressing delegates from 30 countries

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil addressed delegates from over 30 countries at the Bengaluru World Trade Centres Association and 54th WTCA Global Business Forum on Monday and said that the State aims to become a USD 1 trillion economy by 2032, by growing at a sustained growth rate of 18 per cent.

The event jointly organised by New York World Trade Centres Association and Bengaluru World Trade Centres Association was inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. The event was hosted for the first time in the State and only for the second time in India.

Together with the private sector, the government has been supporting manufacturers with various land and infrastructure interventions for setting up plug-and-play industrial parks and clusters on several thousands of acres of industrial land in the Beyond Bengaluru region. Modernising supply chains by connecting developed and proposed clusters to ports, rail and air would also give the sector a significant boost, he explained.

The event was hosted for the first time in the State and only for the second time in India *PHOTO: X.COM/@MBPATIL*

In the last five years per capita income in the State has increased 62 per cent and with the huge potential for growth and untapped markets, it will continue to provide opportunities for all, Patil emphasised.

The state is also partnering with technology companies to leverage industry 4.0 technologies and the State will drive automation and develop AI-powered subscription products or services, he added."Our Industrial Policy for the period 2020-25 provides multiple financial incentives to create favourable economics for investors. Further, we will soon bring in a new clean mobility policy that aims to position Karnataka as the premier destination for Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturing," Patil stated.State's sector-wise policies like Aerospace and Defense, ESDM Special Incentive package, ER&D (Engineering Research and Development) policy etc. provide best-in-class incentives and we are actively enhancing investor friendliness to facilitate a seamless business environment, Patil remarked.Our comprehensive policy reforms point that we are a policy-driven state and we would like to partner with WTA in achieving the State's aspiration of becoming a global manufacturing hub and leading the path of sustainable growth, Patil remarked.World Trade Centers Association Chairman, John Drew, Deloitte CEO Romal Shetty, Brigade Chairman MR Jaishankar,Chairman, WTC Bengaluru MD Vineet Verma, and Brigade Group JMD, Nirupa Shanka, were present. *—ANI*

Will retire if bribe claims are proven: CM

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah challenged BJP-JD(S) Opposition alliance on Monday, saying he would retire from politics if anyone could prove that he had taken even 5 paise in commission from any contractor. "I would retire from politics if it was proved that anyone had given him a bribe of five paise to Letter of Credit (LOC) during the period 2013-2018 and my second term as Chief Minister," Siddaramaiah said at a convention of State Contractors' Association in Bengaluru on Monday.

Siddaramaiah said he has instructed to allocate Rs 4,000 crore to clear pending bills owed to contractors by Public Works Department, ensuring Rs 25 crore for each Assembly constituency. He assured contractors that their outstanding dues would be settled gradually, with Congress government aiming to abolish the package system (clubbing multiple works into one) for project execution.

Highlighting the failure of the Central government to fulfil promises made in Union Budget, Siddaramaiah criticised the BJP-led administration. *—Salar News*

Govt issues advisory to beat the heat

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Department of Health and Family Welfare Department issued a public health advisory due to State's rising temperatures. The advisory urges people, especially vulnerable sections, to exercise caution as the hot weather is expected to persist for several days.

The department advised people to stay hydrated by consuming sufficient fluids. It emphasised extra caution for vulnerable groups such as infants, pregnant women, individuals with mental or physical health conditions and the elderly. The advisory recommends covering heads from direct sunlight and using oral rehydration solutions (ORS) to prevent dehydration.

The scorching temperatures come amid a severe drought impacting the State. Many areas in Bengaluru are going dry and many parts of the City are facing water scarcity. Depleted borewells have forced residents to rely on water tankers, leading to allegations of price gouging.Residents report that the cost of a 1,000-litre water tanker has surged from Rs 600 - Rs 800 to over Rs 2,000. *—Salar News*

Riverfront project set to attract tourists

SHIVAMOGGA, 4 MARCH

PHOTO: SALAR

At a staggering cost of 80 crore, Shivamogga city Corporation under the Smart City initiative, is all set to transform the Tunga River bank into a recreational hub.

Moreover, the riverfront has been designed to cater to both day and night visitors, featuring illuminated pathways, enchanting electric decorations, and a host of recreational amenities. From cycling tracks to children's play areas, from scenic viewpoints to open-air theatres, the riverbank offers a perfect setting for picnics and rejuvenating outings.

For birdwatching enthusiasts, a dedicated watchtower has been set up. Boating facilities further enrich the visitor experience, while activity walls, stone benches, and a multi-purpose sports complex cater to diverse interests. *—Salar News*

SC to hear BBC's plea against proceedings

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to hear a plea filed by BBC challenging the contempt proceedings initiated by the Karnataka High Court against its OTT platform for showing documentary 'Wild Karnataka' despite a restraining order.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra issued notice on BBC's plea and tagged the matter with a similar petition filed by Netflix.

The top court had on 25January, 2024 stayed the contempt proceedings initiated by the Karnataka High Court against Netflix for showing the documentary.

Earlier, the High Court had framed civil contempt charges against various broadcasters including BBC, Discovery and Netflix in a case where the filmmakers and broadcasters were accused of disobeying a 2021 interim order of the court regarding the release and telecast of the documentary. The interim order was passed by the high court on 29 June, 2021 on the plea of Ravindra N Redkar and Ullash Kumar. *—PTI*

BJP's 2nd list likely tomorrow: Yediyurappa

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

BJP's Parliamentary Board member and former Karnataka chief minister BS Yediyurappa indicated on Monday the party's second list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections is likely to be finalised on Wednesday.

BJP came out with its first list of 195 candidates across 16 States and Union Territories on March two. Yediyurappa said he is going to the national capital on Wednesday.

"Day after tomorrow, there is a meeting in Delhi. I am going there. Most probably the second list (of Lok Sabha candidates) (also) comprising Karnataka may be finalised. In view of that, I am going to Delhi. I believe that the list will be finalised day after tomorrow. National leaders will take a final decision on the list," he said. Yediyurappa said: "Most probably there will not be any delay. All the seats may be declared."

PHOTO: PTI

On the likelihood of some new faces being fielded in Karnataka, he said he has no clue as to what's on the minds of the party's national leaders. "Final decision will be taken by the leaders in Delhi", he added.The party stalwart also did not say how many seats would be allotted to NDA partner JD(S) in the State but added that an agreement would be reached with the outfit led by HD Deve Gowda. *—PTI*

WATER CRISIS AFFECTS ALL

As water scarcity increases due to summer and low level of water in the dams, people opt for BWSSB water tankers in Bengaluru on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Residents suffer due to govt rules on pvt water tankers

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The water crisis in Bengaluru has reached critical levels, with residents facing severe difficulties in booking water tankers for their daily needs after Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced the State government's decision to take control of all private water tankers to address the situation.

However, despite this intervention, residents are still struggling to secure water supply because the private water tankers are not willing to supply water until they receive the licence from the government.

The situation remains grim across the City as many RO water plants are not functioning and there is a severe shortage of water tankers who prefer to cater to hotels and restaurants early in the morning hours before the demand heats up. Many Residents' Welfare Associations in the City have banned car washing and temporarily closed down swimming pools. Many residents have expressed frustration over the situation, highlighting the unavailability of private tankers and government orders without providing them the alternative solution.

Despite efforts to contact authorities like Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board, residents have reported a lack of response.

The situation is particularly dire in areas such as Kanakapura Road. S Thimmappa, who stays there, said, "Six years back they put the pipeline to supply Cauvery water and we still did not hear any progress yet and now we are not get water because the water level is less." Sanjeev Jhamb said, "There is no water at our apartment in Konanakunte for two days and in our apartment we are getting only one hour of water."

Similarly, residents in South Bengaluru areas like Nagarbhavi , Horamavu, Banaswadi and Annapoorneshwari Layout have experienced irregular water supply, exacerbating the crisis. *—Salar News*

Vrishabhavathi lift irrigation scheme to treat waste water

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has laid the foundation stone for Vrishabhavathi Lift Irrigation Scheme, which will fill 83 lakes in Bengaluru Urban, Bengaluru Rural and Tumakuru districts by treating waste water flowing through Vrishabhavathi River. The project is on the lines of Koramangala-Challaghatta Valley project which is filling up over 100 tanks in Kolar district. Municipal Infrastructure Development had issued tenders for the project Vrishabhavathi Lift Irrigation Scheme valued at Rs 865 crore, with an anticipated completion period of three years. As part of the project, treated water from Nayandahalli Sewage Treatment Plant will be pumped to Veeranjanipura tank in Nelamangala, along with 82 other lakes. Among these lakes, 10 are situated in Bengaluru Urban. *—Salar News*

ALL SMILES

Gold medalists Nanditha S, Snehashree S and Aparna TM during the 58th Convocation of University of Agriculture Sciences, at GKVK campus in Bengaluru on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

TREAT FOR MOVIEGOERS

Film Festivals saviours for small movies with unusual story lines

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

With OTT space accommodating lesser films that are not popular enough to 'land on the home page', film festivals have become the only avenue to connect with the audience, said Kannada filmmaker Shishir Rajmohan, whose 'Abracadabra', starring veteran actor Anant Nag, was premiered at the 15th edition of Bangalore International Film Festival on Saturday.

"As such, I feel Kannada films are the last in the pecking order when it comes to the OTT curation of South films. But a lot has changed too since the world recouped after Covid. OTT platforms are simply not taking any more chances with small films with unconventional storylines," Rajmohan said.

Rajmohan's 'Abracadabra', produced by Rakshit Shetty's Paramvah Studios, is one of the 12 films selected for the Kannada competition section.

"Even though it is produced by Paramvah Studios, the film is not intended for a theatrical release. As we are not very much about OTT too, as of now, its focus is film festivals. I only wish we got more screenings for the film at the Bangalore International Film Festival (BIFFes). We have only got two," said Rajmohan.

The 200 films selected for this year's BIFFes, which will be on till 7 March, include films of legendary directors from across the world, popular Kannada films and those of debut directors, some of which are in languages that are being slowly lost to the world.

The 200 films selected for this year's BIFFes, include Kannada films and films from across the world *PHOTO: PTI*

One of these films is Uttam Kamati's Santali-language film 'Kherwal'. Kamati said his film, which was showcased on 2 March, managed to draw only a handful of people even at the festival. "For films like 'Kherwal' that are primarily fuelled by a passion for filmmaking, festivals are the only outlet as of now. You see, I am 'Kherwal's' director, producer, scriptwriter and pretty much everything. And if not for film festivals, I will also be its only audience," Kamati said.

Incidentally, 'Kherwal', which revolves around the dying wish of a Norwegian who breathed his last in a Santhali village, won Kamati the FFSI KR Mohanan award for the best debut director at last year's International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK).

Santhosh Mada, whose film 'Moogajjana Koli' is in Arebashe (a Kannada dialect spoken primarily by the Gowda community) language, said he knew that he was restricting the scope of his movie if he chose to set it in a language that not many outside Karnataka know about. Despite this, he chose the path less travelled because he wanted to "do something different".

Ode to Mrinal Sen

On day four of the film festival on Monday, a special segment was dedicated to the legendary filmmaker Mrinal Sen. Renowned director and actor Shekhar Das, a jury member for Indian Cinema Competition, highlighted five of Sen's films – 'Interview', 'Akaler Sandhane', 'Bhuvan Shome', 'Kharij', and 'Oka Oori Katha', emphasising their portrayal of significant political and societal changes that resonated with contemporary politics.

Interactive session explores film criticism

An interactive session titled "Contribution of the Film Critics in Understanding Films as an Academic Discipline" brought together prominent film critics VK Joseph, N Vidyashankar, MK Raghavendra, Prof. Manu Chakravarty, Ashok Rane, Dr. Rwita Dutta, and Prof. Piyush Roy. The session shed light on the often misunderstood concept of "film critique" in India, where film and media studies remain relatively under-explored. *—SalarNews/PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

TMC MLA Tapas Roy resigns ahead of LS polls

KOLKATA, 4 MARCH

Dealing a blow to Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress, veteran leader Tapas Roy quit his party and resigned as its MLA on Monday, citing disillusionment with TMC leadership. Roy submitted his resignation to Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee and stated that he had already put in his papers on 1 March for the multiple party and government positions he held. Roy, a five-time MLA, accused TMC and its supremo Mamata Banerjee of "deserting him during trying circumstances", expressing his frustration over the party's silence when his residence was raided by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on 12 January. TMC, however, alleged that Roy was exerting "undue pressure for a ticket" from North Kolkata seat for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Roy's resignation gave rise to fervent speculations on whether the senior leader would join BJP, or for that matter, any other Opposition party in the state. *—PTI*

HP women aged 18-60 to get ₹1,500 per month

SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Monday announced that the state government will give Rs 1,500 per month to women in the age group of 18 to 60 years from the next financial year. This was one of the 10 'guarantees' promised by the Congress ahead of the assembly polls. Addressing the media here, he said that Rs 800 crore would be spent on the initiative -- Indira Gandhi Pyari Behna Sukh Samman Nidhi Yojna -- annually and over five lakh women would be covered under it. He said that with this, five out of 10 poll promises have been fulfilled and reiterated that the old pension scheme was restored benefitting 1.36 lakh employees of the state.*—PTI*

Delhi excise policy scam: Sisodia seeks early hearing in SC

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Jailed AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Monday sought an early hearing of his two curative petitions in the Supreme Court challenging the 2023 verdict of the court denying him bail in the corruption and money laundering cases related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra was told by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Sisodia, that a trial court has said it will not hear the bail plea till the curative is decided. A Delhi court had deferred hearing on Sisodia's bail plea after noting that an application related to the case was pending before the Supreme Court. Sisodia was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on 26 February, 2023 for his alleged role in the "scam". *—PTI*

UP CM Adityanath gets bomb threat, FIR filed

LUCKNOW, 4 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh police on Monday said that a case has been registered against an unknown person following a bomb threat to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. According to police, the threat call was made on 2 March to a chief constable posted at the security headquarters. "The caller told Chief Constable that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will be blown up by a bomb and disconnected the call," officials said. An FIR has been registered at Mahanagar police station against the unknown caller and an investigation is underway, police said. *—ANI*

PM MODI LAUNCHES ₹56K CR PROJECTS IN TELANGANA

Telangana CM Revanth Reddy praises Modi, calls him 'big brother'

ADILABAD, 4 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy during the launch of development initiatives, in Adilabad, Telangana, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated multiple power, rail and road projects and laid the foundation stone for others, totalling more than Rs 56,000 crore, in Telangana, where Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy of Congress received him and shared the dais with him.

Modi said the projects worth Rs 56,000 crore will write a new chapter of development in several states.

Today, India is the "only country" in the world that has emerged as a large economy by clocking 8.4 per cent growth in the previous quarter, he said, adding that India's growth rate has been a point of discussion across the world for the past 3-4 days. "With this pace, India will become the third largest economy in the world."

State Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy took part in the PM's official function here. Union Minister and BJP state president G Kishan Reddy was also present.

It's after a long while that a Chief Minister of Telangana has received Modi and shared the dais with him at an official event. When BRS supremo K Chandrasekhar Rao was chief minister, he had skipped the Modi'sofficial visits to the state on several occasions.

He noted that the central government and Telangana state have both completed 10 years and said the government has been providing all possible assistance to the state to fulfil the dreams of its people.

Emphasising that the nation's development comes through the growth of states, he said that with a better economy, trust in the country grows and that states also benefit from it as they get investment.

Revanth Reddy, in his address, said the PM was like a "big brother" and that the state needs his support for it to progress like Gujarat, Modi's home-state.

"We would like to contribute to the ambitious target of a USD 5 trillion economy," he added.

Among the many projects, the PM virtually inaugurated NTPC's 800 MW (Unit-2) of Telangana Super Thermal Power Project in Peddapalli. The foundation stone of the project had also been laid by the PM when the project was begun.

Based on ultra-supercritical technology, the plant will supply 85 per cent power to Telangana and have the highest power generation efficiency of approximately 42 per cent, among all NTPC power stations. *—PTI*

BJP clinches deputy, senior deputy mayor seats in C'garh

CHANDIGARH, 4 MARCH

Kuljeet Sandhu, Rajinder Sharma *PHOTO: X*

BJP on Monday won the re-election for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor of Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, defeating Congress candidates who were backed by AAP.

On 20 February, Supreme Court declared Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Kuldeep Kumar as the new mayor of the corporation after it overturned the result of the 30 January mayoral poll in which BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar had emerged as the winner.

As the mayor is the presiding officer for the elections to the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor, the polls were held again on Monday after the change in the mayoral post following the court's judgment.

For the post of senior deputy mayor, BJP's Kuljeet Sandhu defeated Congress' Gurpreet Gabi. While Sandhu polled 19 votes, Gabi got 16, and one vote was declared invalid.

Rajinder Sharma of BJP defeated Congress' Nirmala Devi to win the deputy mayor's post. The winning candidate secured 19 votes of the total 36 polled.In the 35-member municipal House, BJP has 17 councillors. The number of BJP's strength increased from 14 to 17 after three AAP councillors switched over to it on 19 February.Kumar had initially moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court against the declaration of Chandigarh's mayoral result on January 30. After not getting any interim relief, he moved the Supreme Court to quash the election of BJP candidate as the mayor.

Chandigarh administration on today had placed a formal schedule regarding the polling for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor before Punjab and Haryana High Court. *—PTI*

SC asks AAP to vacate Delhi HC's land by 15 June

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Supreme Court on Monday gave time to Aam Aadmi Party till 15 June to vacate its political office located on a plot that was allotted to Delhi High Court to expand the district judiciary after taking note of the upcoming general election.

A bench led by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud also permitted AAP to apply to the Land and Development Office of the Government of India for allotment of the alternate land by the law in the meantime.

Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for AAP, apprised the court that they were allotted the land in 2015 by the government of Delhi.

However, CJI commented to AAP's counsel that, being part of the court, he can't say that land cannot be given to High Court.

AAP's counsel said that a month before the election, they will be on the road if they vacate the land now. He informed the court that the government was allotting them land far away in Badarpur.

The construction of a residential project comprising 70 residential units for judicial officers commenced at Dwarka in October 2014. which came to a standstill due to structural defects, A report has been submitted by CBRI, Roorkee, highlighting the substandard quality of construction. *—ANI*

Sources say state minister Vikramaditya Singh has spoken with the AICC leadership *PHOTO: ANI*

CM Sukhu's HP govt not in danger, says Congress

SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

- BJP state President Rajiv Bindal, in a statement issued here, said that the Congress is taking dictatorial decisions.

Congress government in Himachal Pradesh is "not in danger" and will complete its five-year term, party sources claimed on Monday and indicated that state minister Vikramaditya Singh had spoken with the AICC leadership.

They also said the leadership has faith in Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu and the work he has done till now. A change in leadership, therefore, seems unlikely for now, the sources said.

Action has been taken against the rebel MLAs under the anti-defection law which prohibits the "Aayaram-Gayaram" tactics, the sources said.

After the disqualification of six MLAs under the anti-defection law, the number of MLAs in the House now remains at 62 and the government has more support than the majority figure of 32, the sources claimed. BJP and rebel MLAs are only spreading false news about the government. The rebel MLAs themselves are "apologising and sending feelers" they claimed.

In a setback for the ruling Congress in Himachal Pradesh, the BJP last Tuesday won the state's lone Rajya Sabha seat despite being in the minority with just 25 MLAs against 40 of the Congress as nine MLAs, including six from the Congress and three Independents, voted for BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan.

BJP on Monday accused the ruling Congress in Himachal Pradesh of using police and administration against party rebels and independent MLAs who voted in favour of the BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan in the Rajya Sabha elections.

BJP state President Rajiv Bindal, in a statement issued here, said that the Congress is taking dictatorial decisions.

Raiding the houses and business outlets of MLAs, taking various types of actions against them and people associated with them, sending people to instigate fights and creating an atmosphere of fear in the entire state is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, he said.

The Congress government is in panic mode after the victory of Mahajan against Abhishek Singhvi in the Rajya Sabha polls, he said.

Congress has murdered democracy by suspending 15 BJP MLAs to pave the way for passing the budget in an unjust manner and disqualifying six Congress MLAs who cross-voted for the BJP in Rajya Sabha elections, Bindal added. *—PTI*

KHURSHID'S WIFE, 2 OTHERS LAUNDERED GOVT FUNDS: ED

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate on Monday alleged that senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid's wife Louise Khurshid and two others "laundered" Rs 71.50 lakh in central government funds for their personal gain.ED said in a statement that it has provisionally attached 15 agricultural land parcels located in the Farrukhabad district of Uttar Pradesh and some bank deposits, worth a combined Rs 45.92 lakh, of the Dr Zakir Hussain Memorial Trust, under provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

A probe found that "grant-in-aid of Rs 71.50 lakh received by the trust was not utilised for holding camps sanctioned by the Government of India but was laundered by Pratyush Shukla, a representative of the trust, Mohammad Athar, secretary to the trust, and Louise Khurshid, project director of the trust, for the interest of the trust and their personal gain", the ED claimed.The fund received as grant-in-aid was laundered for their personal gain and leading to generation of proceeds of crime, it said.The case stems from 17 First Information Report (FIRs) of the Economic Offences Wing of the Uttar Pradesh Police. *—PTI*

Delhi presents ₹76K cr budget, women to get ₹1K per month

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Delhi Finance Minister Atishi Singh,Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal at the Vidhan Sabha on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Delhi government on Monday presented an Rs 76,000-crore budget for FY25, which it claimed to be inspired by the vision of 'Ram Rajya', and announced a monthly payment of Rs 1,000 to all women under a scheme that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal termed the world's biggest step towards women empowerment.

Presenting the 2024-25 budget in Delhi Assembly ahead of Lok Sabha elections, state Finance Minister Atishi also announced the implementation of the Business Blasters scheme in universities and industrial training institutes (ITIs). The scheme is already being implemented in government schools.Government allocated Rs 16,396 crore for education, down from the previous fiscal's allocation of Rs 16,575 crore. Similarly, health sector's outlay of Rs 8,685 crore is less than Rs 9,742 earmarked in the previous budget. *—PTI*

KEJRI AGREES TO APPEAR BEFORE ED VIRTUALLY

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Arvind Kejriwal *PHOTO: PTI*

In response to the eighth summons of Directorate of Enforcement (ED) which asked Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to appear before ED on 4 March, Kejriwal has written a reply to ED stating the ED's summon as "illegal", however he has agreed to appear before the agency virtually on any date after 12 March.Earlier on 27 February, ED issued an eighth summons to Kejriwal in a money laundering probe related to irregularities in the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22 case, asking him to join the investigation on 4 March. The fresh summons followed the seventh summons which he had skipped on 26 February. ED wants to record Kejriwal's statement in the case on issues like the formulation of policy, meetings held before it was finalised, and allegations of bribery.The case is based on a First Information Report (FIR) alleging multiple irregularities in the formation and implementation of the Delhi excise policy (2021-22) by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The policy was withdrawn after allegations of corruption.The excise policy was aimed to revitalise the city's flagging liquor business and replace a sales-volume-based regime with a license fee for traders. It promised swankier stores and a better buying experience. The policy introduced discounts and offers on the purchase of liquor for the first time in Delhi.Two senior AAP leaders -- Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh -- are already under judicial custody in the case. Sisodia, was arrested by the CBI on 26 February and on 5 October, ED arrested Singh. *—ANI*

AFTER LALU'S 'NO FAMILY' JIBE

BJP leaders say 'we are Modi's family'

LUCKNOW, 4 MARCH

BJP leaders Amit Shah, JP Nadda, added 'Modi ka Parivaar' to social media biodata on Monday to express solidarity *PHOTO: X*

After RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav made a 'no family' remark jibe against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath added 'Modi ka Parivaar' to his social media biodata on Monday.

Top BJP leaders, including Amit Shah, JP Nadda, Nitin Gadkari, Jyotiraditya Scindia and others, also added 'Modi ka Parivaar' to their social media biodata.

Lalu Yadav, while addressing the party's 'Jan Vishwas Maha Rally' in Patna on Sunday, said, "These days he is talking about dynastic politics. You (Modi) don't have a family. You are not even a Hindu. When your mother died, every Hindu, as per tradition, shaves his beard and head. Why did you not shave? You only spread hatred in society," RJD Chief Lalu Yadav said.

Reacting to Lalu's statement, in an address in Telangana's Adilabad, Modi said, "The leaders of the INDIA alliance, deeply engrossed in corruption, nepotism and appeasement, are becoming nervous. When I question their 'Parivarvad', they have started saying that Modi has no family," said Modi.

Congress on Monday took a swipe at the BJP over its campaign of leaders suffixing their names on social media profiles with "Modi Ka Parivar", saying they were "misleading" the people from real issues and indulging in such tactics as the INDIA bloc was "growing".

Asked about the BJP's campaign, Congress general secretary organisation K C Venugopal said, "You could see the enthusiasm among the public in Patna yesterday. Everyday INDIA bloc is growing, that is why the BJP people are annoyed." *—PTI/ANI*

HC bins Moitra's plea to restrain Dubey

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Delhi High Court on Monday dismissed an interim plea by TMC leader Mahua Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha recently, seeking to restrain BJP MP Nishikant Dubey and advocate Jai Anant Dehadrai from posting or circulating any "fake and defamatory" content against her.

Justice Sachin Datta, while pronouncing the order, said "I have dismissed the injunction application".

High Court had on 20 December, 2023 reserved its order on the interim application after hearing the counsel for Moitra, Dubey, and Dehadrai.

The expelled Lok Sabha member from Krishnanagar in West Bengal, in her plea filed in October last year, sought a permanent injunction against Dubey, Dehadrai, social media platforms X, search engine Google, YouTube, and 15 media houses from making, publishing, circulating per se defamatory, ex facie false and malicious statements against her.

Dubey had accused Moitra of taking bribes from businessman and Hiranandani Group CEO Darshan Hiranandani for asking questions in Parliament.

Based on these allegations by Dubey, Lok Sabha Ethics Committee had suggested Moitra's removal from the lower house following which she was expelled on 8 December, 2023. *—PTI*

2 held in INLD Chief Rathee's murder

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Two people have been arrested in connection with the murder of Haryana Indian National Lok Dal's (INLD) Chief Nafe Singh Rathee. According to Jhajjar police, the shooters were nabbed from Goa in a joint operation of Haryana's Jhajjar police, Delhi Police Special Cell, and the Haryana Special Task Force (STF).The police said that the accused, identified as Saurav and Ashish, residents of Delhi are suspected to have links with the UK-based Kapil Sangwan gang. The search for two other shooters is underway, they added. Rathee was shot dead on 25 February. *—ANI*

PHOTO: ANI

Religious conversion: SC grants bail to UP varsity VC

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday granted interim bail to Rajendra Bihari Lal, vice chancellor of Uttar Pradesh's Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, in a case of alleged illegal religious conversion. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra issued notice to the UP government on his plea challenging the Allahabad High Court. The top court noted that the High Court is not hearing the bail plea filed by Lal who has been in custody since 31 December last year."Issue notice, in the meantime, by way of ad interim order, we grant interim bail to the petitioner," the bench said while adding that the quantum of bail bond shall not exceed Rs 25,000. Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for Lal, submitted that the petitioner was arrested despite the apex court's order.—*PTI*

Two students drown, 3 missing in TN's Mahabalipuram

MAHABALIPURAM, 4 MARCH

Two students from Andhra Pradesh who were part of a group of nine students on a trip to the Mahabalipuram beach in Tamil Nadu drowned in the sea, police said. While four students have been rescued, a search is on for the other three who went missing, police said on Sunday. According to Mahabalipuram Police officials, "A group of students from Andhra Pradesh were on a trip to Mahabalipuram. They were playing and bathing in the sea, when rough waves dragged them inside."Panic stricken students screamed for assistance and on hearing them, locals and police rushed and rescued four of them. "Four students have been rescued. Two have drowned while three students are missing and search is going on," they said.—*ANI*

Two more arrested by ED in Mahadev betting app case

RAIPUR, 4 MARCH

In a significant development in the Mahadev betting app case, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has made two more arrests, further intensifying its probe into the alleged money laundering and illicit activities associated with the app. Suraj Chokhani, the Managing Director of Ability Games Ltd Company, and Girish Talreja, known to be suspected key players in the case, were remanded to one-day judicial custody by the Raipur Court on Sunday. The recent arrests follow the arrest of Nitish Diwan in the same money laundering case. Saurabh Pandey, the lawyer representing the ED, revealed that the statements of Chokhani and Talreja were recorded to validate the claims made by Diwan.—*ANI*

4 killed, 3 injured as vehicle falls into gorge in Ramban

BANIHAL/JAMMU, 4 MARCH

Four people were killed and three injured when an SUV carrying them skidded off the road and rolled down into a deep gorge in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district on Monday, official sources said. The car, which was on its way from Ukhrall to Maligam, skidded off due to slippery road conditions and fell into a gorge near Maligam, they said. The locals rushed to the spot and rescued the victims, the police said. The SUV driver and three passengers lost their lives in the incident, they said.—*PTI*

SC: Farmers' protest serious, don't file pleas for publicity

Petitioner claimed states have fortified Delhi's borders

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Issues related to farmers' protest are "serious", the Supreme Court said on Monday and asked a litigant to desist from filing petitions based only on newspaper reports for publicity.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan, allowed petitioner Agnostos Theos, the Managing Director of the Sikh Chamber of Commerce, to withdraw his plea that alleged violation of the rights of the "peacefully protesting" farmers by the Centre and some states.

A request for withdrawal of the plea was made at the very start of the hearing by a counsel for Theos who said he intended to amend the petition.

"These are very serious issues. Don't file these petitions based only on newspaper reports for publicity purposes. Only those people who are serious and committed should file these petitions. If you have gone through the newspaper reports, then you must be aware that the high court is seized of the matter," Justice Kant told the council.

The court said one should not file these petitions based only on newspaper reports PHOTO: PTI

The bench said the petitioner must know that the High Court has already passed certain directions on the issue.

"Next time be careful. Do your own research, these are complex issues," the bench told the counsel and allowed him to withdraw the petition.

Theos claimed in his plea that the Centre and some states have issued "threats" and fortified the national capital's borders, after several farmer unions called protests seeking legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for their crops and implementation of the Swaminathan committee's recommendations.

"The petitioner is seeking a writ of mandamus in the interest of the farmers who are facing unfair treatment in their peaceful protests," it said.

It claimed some protesters were arrested and forcibly detained by various state governments, and the Centre unduly invoked prohibitory measures, including blocking social media accounts, rerouting traffic and blocking roads.

- It claimed some protesters were arrested and forcibly detained by various state governments, and the Centre invoked measures, including blocking accounts and roads

In the absence of medical aid, the injuries got aggravated and also caused deaths, the plea claimed, adding fortifications at Delhi's borders have created a "hostile and violent situation", and did not allow the farmers to exercise their democratic right to protest.

The plea sought a direction to the Centre, the four states and the National Human Rights Commission to "consider the reasonable demands of the farmers from across India, who are in continuous peaceful protest, demonstration and agitation". —*PTI*

BOMBAY HC SAYS

'Education is pious but is now unaffordable'

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

Education, which is considered pious in the Indian culture, has now become unaffordable, the Bombay High Court has said noting it is the state's constitutional responsibility to ensure quality education reaches everyone.

A division bench of Justices AS Chandurkar and Jitendra Jain made these observations while refusing to quash decisions taken by the Maharashtra government to grant permission to two organisations to set up educational institutions in Pune.

The High Court in its 21 February order said the court is not an expert in education policy matters and state government is the best authority to select the best and mere power to choose cannot be termed as arbitrary.

"Pune is known as the 'Oxford of the East' for decades and it has attracted students not only from India but other countries as well. This has resulted in Pune being a hub of educational institutions," the High Court noted.

With the passage of time and due to growth of the city, there has been a huge growth and competition in setting up of colleges and schools not only in the city of Pune but also around its periphery, it said.

"Although education is considered pious in our culture but with change in time it has taken a different colour and has become unaffordable," the High Court said.

In such circumstances, it is the state's constitutional responsibility to ensure quality education reaches one and all to achieve growth and development of humanity, it added.

The court dismissed the two petitions, filed by the Jagruti Foundation and the Sanjay Modak Education Society, challenging decisions taken by the state government last year refusing to grant them permission to set up educational institutions in Pune.

—*PTI*

Mumbai man booked for raping friend 15 years ago; forcing abortion

THANE, 4 MARCH

Navi Mumbai Police have registered a First Information Report (FIR) on the complaint of a 31-year-old married woman claiming she was raped 15 years ago in Jalna city by her male friend while the latter's brother forced her to undergo abortion and threatened her family members, an official said on Monday.

No arrest has been made so far, a Khandeshwar police station official said.

The woman, a resident of Panvel, alleged Ramesh Akhade, who is known to her, had raped her repeatedly when they were living in Jalna in 2009, following which she became pregnant, as per the FIR

When the woman informed Akhade about her pregnancy, he and his brother Raju Akhade threatened her and her mother, the official said quoting the FIR.

"Raju Akhade forced the woman to accompany him to Sanpada in Navi Mumbai and made her undergo abortion," he added.The woman later got married to another man but Ramesh Akhade allegedly forced her to get separated from her husband and made her stay with him in Panvel. "However, differences cropped up between them and he drove the woman out of his house, following which she lodged a complaint with the police," as per the FIR. —*PTI*

WOMAN PERFORMER RAPED BY CO-STARS IN J'KHAND

MEDININAGAR, 4 MARCH

A 21-year-old stage performer from Chhattisgarh was allegedly gang-raped by her co-artistes in Jharkhand's Palamu district, police said on Monday.The woman was allegedly raped by three co-artistes hailing from Palamu in a car after being given an intoxicating substance by them, a police officer said."Two accused have been arrested and the survivor has been admitted to a hospital in Palamu where her medical test will be conducted," Vishrampur Sub-divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Rakesh Singh told PTI.

The incident occurred on a road in Vishrampur police station area, around 200 km from state capital Ranchi, late on Saturday. The accused fled the spot after leaving the woman there in an unconscious state, he said. Police were informed about the incident on Sunday, following which two accused were arrested and a manhunt is on for the third person, he added.

—*PTI*

HAND THAT FEEDS

Farmers harvest potatoes at a field in Agra on Monday PHOTO: PTI

Stranded tourists in Spiti Valley shifted; 1 killed in landslide

SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

As many as 81 tourists stranded in Himachal Pradesh's Spiti Valley due to closure of roads after heavy snowfall have been shifted to safer places, police said on Monday.

An excavator operator engaged in clearing a blocked stretch on the Shimla-Kinnaur road on National Highway 5 at Negulsari in Kinnaur died this morning after shooting stones fell on him. The deceased was identified as Madan,27, a resident of Kullu, officials said.

Meanwhile, over 650 roads, including five national highways, in the state remained closed for vehicular movement on Monday following several avalanches and landslides caused by incessant rain and snow for the past three days, according to the state emergency operation centre. The 81 tourists stranded in Spiti Valley in Lahaul and Spiti district were on Sunday night shifted to and accommodated in different hotels and homestays there, the police said in a statement.

About 290 roads are blocked in this tribal district and several areas are without electricity PHOTO: PTI

About 290 roads are blocked in this tribal district and several areas are without electricity for the past two days, the statement said.Heavy rain and snow in Lahaul and Spiti has also disrupted the mobile network, it added.

— *PTI*

NOTICE TO BIHAR ON 'DEPLORABLE' GOVT SCHOOLS

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Bihar government on a plea alleging deplorable condition of government schools in the state and seeking directions to ensure they have basic facilities and civic amenities.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra issued notice on an appeal filed by NGO Social Jurist.

The NGO has approached the top court against an order of the Patna High Court dated 19 January, 2024 dismissing its plea and saying the government is taking all steps to improve primary level education in the state. —*PTI*

Avoid performing religious rituals in court premises, says SC

PUNE, 4 MARCH

Supreme Court Judge Justice Abhay Oka advised the legal fraternity to avoid performing "Pooja in the court premises during events while asking to inaugurate any event by bowing down before the copy of the Preamble to the Constitution.

He was speaking at a foundation laying event of new court building in Pimpri-Chinchwad in Pune District on Sunday.

Justice Oka said, "This year on 26 November, we will complete 75 years of adopting the Constitution given by Baba Saheb Ambedkar. I always feel that our constitution has two important words in the Preamble, one is secular and second is democracy. Some may say secularism means (Dharmnirpekshta or Sarv Dharm Sambhav) but I always feel the core of the judicial system is Constitution"."Therefore sometime Judges have to say some unpleasant things, I want to say that now we have to stop doing pooja Archana or lighting lamp kind of rituals during any events related to Judiciary. Instead we should keep the Preamble of the Constitution and bow down to it to start any event. We need to start this new thing to respect our constitution and it's values ...," he added. He further added, "During my tenure in Karnataka I tried to stop such religious rituals but couldn't stop it completely but somehow managed reduce it .."Backing Justice Oka's suggestion, Supreme Court Judge Justice Bhushan Gavai said, "He has given a good suggestion. Instead of performing pooja of a specific religion we should mark the foundation with a spade. We should inaugurate the event by watering the plants as suggested by our colleague Anil Killore. It will definitely send out a good message to society in terms of environment".A bhoomi pujan of the new court building was done by Supreme Court justice Bhushan R Gavai at Pimpri Chinchwad. While speaking on the fundamental right of getting Justice, Justice Bhushan R Gavai said "Justice should be speedy" and "at affordable price" . "Despite (a criminal) spending decade in jail before trial is over, if the judges do not consider a bail, we should think about the current system," he added . —*ANI*

School dropout rates surging in Assam: Survey

GUWAHATI, 4 MARCH

Student dropout rates in state-run primary schools across Assam have been continuously rising for the last few years despite the government taking various initiatives to improve the situation, the latest Economic Survey said.

Terming education as one of the key inputs for balanced social and fiscal development, the Economic Survey, Assam for 2023-24 said the average annual dropout rate in lower primary (LP) schools in the state stood at 8.49 per cent in 2022-23.

As per Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) data, the lower primary school dropout rate was 6.02 per cent in 2021-22, rising from 4.3 per cent in 2019-20 and 3.1 per cent in 2018-19, it added."Likewise in the upper primary (UP) level, the dropout rate is 10.33 per cent in 2022-23 and it was 8.81 per cent in 2021-22," the report stated.The economic survey said that the transition rate from primary to upper primary schools in the state is 89.7 per cent.

The dropout rate for schools is the highest in South Salmara district at 22.52 per cent in the last financial year, followed by 14.54 per cent in Karimganj, while the lowest rate of 4.02 per cent was recorded in Sivasagar."Similarly, in the upper primary level, this rate is the highest at 32.39 per cent in South Salmara and the lowest at 4.03 per cent in Sivasagar during the period 2022-23," it said. —*PTI*

REMAND REPORT SAYS

Kerala vet student was stripped, beaten with belt

WAYANAD, 4 MARCH

The remand report of the suspect linked to the recent death of a second year student at Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University in Wayanad has alleged that the victim was assaulted viciously.

Police had arrested all the 18 accused who have been remanded to judicial custody, in the case pertaining to 20-year-old Sidharthan J S, who was found hanging inside the bathroom of the college hostel on 18 February.

While urging the court to avoid giving bail to the accused, the report submitted by the police on Sunday said that a belt and a cable wire were used to assault Sidharthan.

Police have charged the accused under sections 341 (wrongful restraint), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 324 (voluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapon), 306 (Abetment of suicide), of the Indian Penal Code and relevant sections of the Kerala Prohibition Of Ragging Act.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor pays floral tributes to veterinary student Siddharthan PHOTO: PTI

The report said that his classmates and senior held a public trial inside the hostel alleging that he had misbehaved with a girl student of the college.

Police said that one of the accused called Sidharthan, who had left for home, back to the college to settle the issue related to his "misbehaviour" using the "unwritten law" of the hostel, instead of approaching the police.

- Report said that his classmates and senior held a public trial inside the hostel alleging that he had misbehaved with a girl student of the college

"He was stripped down to his underwear and the accused assaulted him. Some of them used a belt and a cable wire," the report said.

It said that the assault began on 16 February at around 9pm and lasted till 2am on 17 February.

Police urged the court not to give the accused bail as the parents of the deceased have demanded a full inquiry, claiming that the victim would not have killed himself.

Sidharthan was a second year Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry student. His parents have claimed that some of his college mates told them that he was beaten to death by some local SFI leaders and activists.

The father contended that according to the postmortem report, his son's body had three days' worth of injuries and an empty stomach, which indicated that he was brutally beaten up and not given any food.

Following the parents' claims, the political waters in the state were stirred as the Congress and the BJP accused the ruling CPI(M)'s student wing SFI of beating Sidharthan to death. —*PTI*

AIRSTRIKE IN RAFAH

Palestinians search for bodies and survivors in the rubble of a residential building destroyed in an Israeli airstrike in Rafah, Gaza Strip
PHOTO:PTI

Outrage over Brazilian tourist's gangrape

The alleged gangrape of a tourist with Brazilian-Spanish dual nationality in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand has led to outrage.

The 28-year-old woman and her husband, who were on a motorbike tour, had stopped for the night in Dumki district when the alleged attack took place.

Police say that they have arrested four men and are searching for three more.

The identities of the men, who are also accused of beating the woman's partner, have not been disclosed yet.

The couple had travelled to several parts of Asia on their motorbikes before arriving in India a few months ago.

Over the weekend, the woman posted a video on their Instagram page which has 234,000 followers.

"Seven men raped me. They have beaten us and robbed us, although not many things [were taken] because what they wanted was to rape me," she said in Spanish, adding that the men beat them and threatened to kill them.

In a separate video, the husband, who is Spanish, said: "My mouth is destroyed, but my partner is worse than me. They have hit me with the helmet several times, with a stone on the head. Thank goodness she was wearing the jacket and that stops the blows a little."

The videos are no longer up on their page.

Dumka's police superintendent Pitamber Singh Kherwar told reporters the couple flagged down a patrol van which took them to a local health centre for treatment.

"The couple were speaking in a mixture of English and Spanish so the patrolling team could not understand them initially. But they appeared visibly injured so they were taken for treatment," he said, adding that the couple then told doctors about the alleged rape.

The Brazilian embassy in India told that the woman and her husband "were victims of a serious criminal attack". The embassy said it had contacted the woman and local authorities as well as the Spanish embassy, as the couple had used Spanish passports to enter India.

Spanish bloggers Vicente and Fernanda were attacked while camping near Dumki diistric during their motorbike journey. Fernanda alleged that attackers beat the couple and raped her ***PHOTO: INSTAGRAM***

"The Spanish embassy said that it had offered all the assistance available, including psychological care, but that the victims had declined the offer as they were already being looked after by the Indian emergency services," the Brazilian embassy said, adding that it would continue to "monitor all developments".

"We need to stand united in our commitment to end violence against women everywhere in the world," the Spanish embassy in India posted on X (formerly Twitter) on Sunday.

Conversations around rape and sexual violence became more prominent in India after the 2012 gangrape and murder of a young woman on a bus in Delhi led to huge protests and changes to the country's rape laws. But tens of thousands of rapes are reported every year and activists say there is still a long way to go to tackle the issue.

Over the weekend, several women shared their stories of dealing with unwanted sexual attention while travelling in India.

India takes safety of women seriously

Chief of India's National Commission for Women, Rekha Sharma, also sparked criticism after she responded to a post from a US journalist who wrote that while India was one of his favourite places, "the level of sexual aggression" he witnessed while living in the country was "unlike anywhere else I have ever been". He also gave a couple of examples of sexual assault faced by women he knew.

"Did you ever report the incident to police?" Sharma wrote. "If not then you are totally an irresponsible person. Writing only on social media and defaming whole country is not good choice."

Sharma said "To vilify an entire country with a tweet is not only in poor taste but also unacceptable, as data speaks otherwise. As much as this incident needs to be condemned and perpetrators brought to justice, let me share a few statistical indicators and request you to remove this tweet." According to data, over six million tourists arrive in India every year, many of them single women. Several people have also left comments under the couple's Instagram and YouTube videos, expressing solidarity and sympathy with them. The war of words continued to escalate. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

Research shows Covid-19 leaves its mark on brain

From the very early days of the pandemic, brain fog emerged as a significant health condition that many experience after Covid-19.

Brain fog is a colloquial term that describes a state of mental sluggishness or lack of clarity and haziness that makes it difficult to concentrate, remember things and think clearly.

Fast-forward four years and there is now abundant evidence that being infected with SARS-CoV-2 – the virus that causes Covid-19 – can affect brain health in many ways.

In addition to brain fog, Covid-19 can lead to an array of problems, including headaches, seizure disorders, strokes, sleep problems, and tingling and paralysis of the nerves, as well as several mental health disorders.

A large and growing body of evidence amassed throughout the pandemic details the many ways that Covid-19 leaves an indelible mark on the brain. But the specific pathways by which the virus does so are still being elucidated, and curative treatments are nonexistent.

Now, two new studies published in the New England Journal of Medicine shed further light on the profound toll of Covid-19 on cognitive health.

I am a physician scientist, and I have been devoted to studying long Covid since early patient reports about this condition – even before the term "long Covid" was coined. I have testified before the U.S. Senate as an expert witness on long Covid and have published extensively on this topic.

Drops in IQ

Most recently, a new study published in the New England Journal of Medicine assessed cognitive abilities such as memory, planning and spatial reasoning in nearly 113,000 people who had previously had Covid-19. The researchers found that those who had been infected had significant deficits in memory and executive task performance.

This decline was evident among those infected in the early phase of the pandemic and those infected when the delta and omicron variants were dominant. These findings show that the risk of cognitive decline did not abate as the pandemic virus evolved from the ancestral strain to omicron.

Generally the average IQ is about 100. An IQ above 130 indicates a highly gifted individual, while an IQ below 70 generally indicates a level of intellectual disability that may require significant societal support.

To put the finding of the New England Journal of Medicine study into perspective, I estimate that a three-point downward shift in IQ would increase the number of U.S. adults with an IQ less than 70 from 4.7 million to 7.5 million – an increase of 2.8 million adults with a level of cognitive impairment that requires significant societal support.

Another study in the same issue of the New England Journal of Medicine involved more than 100,000 Norwegians between March 2020 and April 2023.

It documented worse memory function at several time points up to 36 months following a positive SARS-CoV-2 test.

Parsing the implications

Taken together, these studies show that Covid-19 poses a serious risk to brain health, even in mild cases, and the effects are now being revealed at the population level.

A recent analysis of the U.S. Current Population Survey showed that after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, an additional 1 million working-age Americans reported having "serious difficulty" remembering, concentrating or making decisions than at any time in the preceding 15 years.

Most disconcertingly, this was mostly driven by younger adults between the ages of 18 to 44.

Data from the European Union shows a similar trend – in 2022, 15% of people in the EU reported memory and concentration issues.

Looking ahead, it will be critical to identify who is most at risk. A better understanding is also needed of how these trends might affect the educational attainment of children and young adults and the economic productivity of working-age adults.

And the extent to which these shifts will influence the epidemiology of dementia and Alzheimer's disease is also not clear.

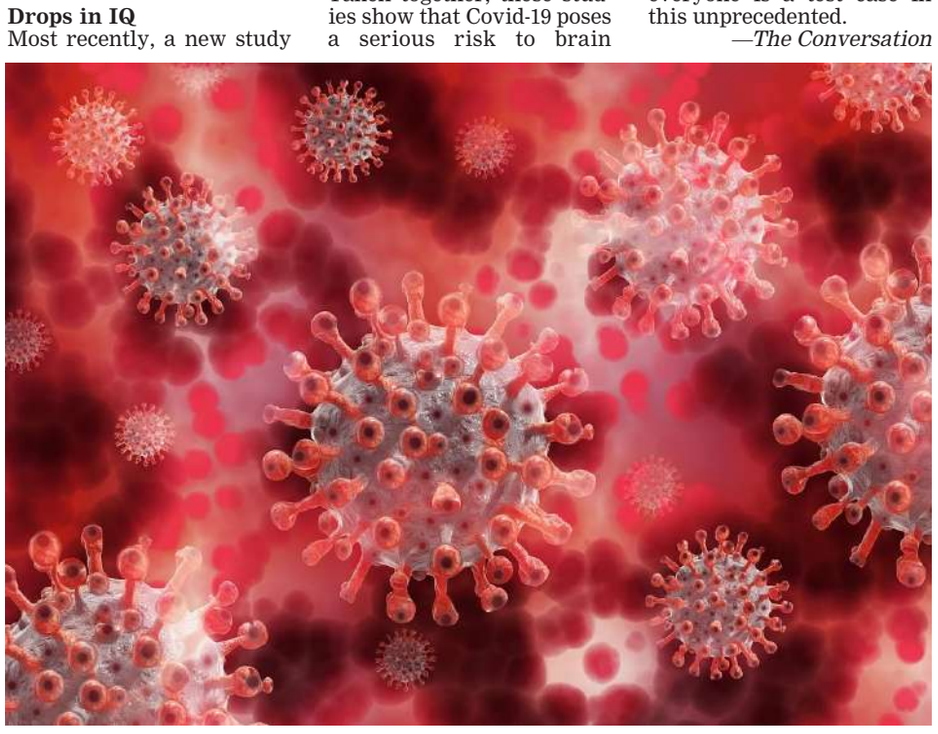
The growing body of research now confirms that Covid-19 should be considered a virus with a significant impact on the brain.

The implications are far-reaching, from individuals experiencing cognitive struggles to the potential impact on populations and the economy.

Lifting the fog on the true causes behind these cognitive impairments, including brain fog, will require years if not decades of concerted effort.

Unfortunately, nearly everyone is a test case in this unprecedented.

—The Conversation



In addition to brain fog, COVID-19 leaves indelible mark on the brain ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

China seeks ways to revive slowing economy

It's clear that China's efforts to build confidence in its slowing economy will top the agenda of this week's meeting of its ceremonial national legislature.

What remains unclear is how the ruling Communist Party can navigate toward stronger, sustained growth as China's workforce is aging, relations with Washington are fraught, and housing construction — a main driver of the economy — is in crisis.

Hopes for a strong, consumer-led recovery after severe anti-virus controls ended in late 2022 have not been fulfilled. Local governments are mired in trillions of dollars of debt and direct investment by foreign companies in China fell by about 80 per cent last year.

As more than 5,000 leaders from across China gather in Beijing for the year's biggest political events, the mood on the streets and in financial markets remains glum.

That's in contrast to official messaging as the country marks 75 years from the People's Republic founding in 1949.

For videographer Wang Tao, the question is what the leadership will do about jobs. At 41, he's struggling to find work in a labour market where companies tend not to hire anyone over 35.

"We are confident of consolidating and enhancing the recovering and growing trend of the economy," the party newspaper People's Daily wrote in a commentary Saturday.

The congress endorses decisions already made by top leaders, providing a platform to publicise government plans and instruct officials on what they should do back home.

China's most powerful leader in decades, Xi Jinping, will preside. He has installed loyalists in top posts to strengthen the party's control over the economy and society. Xi, 70, is in his third five-year term as party general secretary and may hold that post for life.

Premier Li Qiang is expected to announce an official economic growth target when the National People's Congress convenes Tuesday in Beijing's ornate Great Hall of the People. State media suggest it will be about 5 per cent, on par with last year's 5.2 per cent growth.

Many economists are forecasting much slower growth of 4 per cent or less. In 2022, it dipped to 3 per cent, the second-lowest level since at least the 1970s.

China aiming stronger, sustained economy growth as its main driver of economy is in crisis ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Li's annual work report will include plans for "promoting high-quality development and advancing Chinese modernisation," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Many in China are hoping that will mean more government spending, said Logan Wright of the Rhodium Group, an independent researc "The time to solve the short-term problems and prevent them from becoming long-term problems is now. So what is the plan?" Wright said.

The downturn in the proper"The property market has been such a significant source of China's growth and now it has gone into reverse," Wright said, though he noted there are signs the market is stabilising. "If you look at how China is responding to this, it is indicative of a more severe slowdown than what the official data would suggest."

The problems deepened with shocks from the pandemic, when anti-virus controls led some cities into weekslong shutdowns and factories ended up with huge backlogs. Now, instead of soaring prices, China is trying to fend off a potentially debilitating cycle of deflation, or chronically falling prices.

Exports, another main driver of growth, dropped in 2023 for the first time in seven years, even as the US economy remained defied forecasts that it would fall into recession.

Despite official indications that China's yearslong anti-monopoly and data security crackdowns on technology companies have ended, entrepreneurs are jittery. Many small businesses complain they cannot collect on bills owed to them, and bankruptcies have soared.

Meanwhile, global companies have been shifting investments to countries like India and Vietnam to minimise risks from China-US political tensions and the party's tighter domestic controls, in some cases raiding the Chinese offices of foreign businesses.

Xi's talks with President Joe Biden and US business leaders at a regional summit in San Francisco in September conveyed the message that "China is open for business," Zimmerman said, "but there was nothing in there in his presentation that got to specifics about what reform and what type of changes are going to happen, you know, to give people the comfort level."

These challenges come at a time of transition.

One strategy would be to shift more national wealth into workers' pockets, says Michael Pettis, a leading expert on the Chinese economy and professor at Beijing University.

"Worries that China may try to export its way out of its troubles are already raising alarm in the US and Europe, as Chinese banks step up lending to manufacturers of electric vehicles, solar panels and many other industrial products. The issue already features highly in talks between Beijing and Washington.

Some Chinese localities are trying another approach, creating affordable housing programs that invest in unoccupied apartments. Such a move can counter growing inequality and free up more income for spending.

"I think it has to be a combination of short and longer-term measures.," said Louis Kuijs, Asia-Pacific chief economist at S&P Global. "I think anything that can be done to pump momentum into the economy will be helpful." *—BBC News*

4 dead, at least 21 injured in German nursing home fire

BERLIN, 4 MARCH

Four people died and at least 21 were injured in a fire at a retirement home in Bedburg-Hau in the western German state of North Rhine-Westphalia early Monday, German news agency dpa reported. A firefighter and a police officer were also injured and taken to a hospital, police said. In addition to those who were confirmed to be injured, 46 other residents were evacuated and were being examined for possible injuries, dpa reported. The fire, which broke out during the night, has been doused, but firefighters are still working at the scene, it said. The cause of the fire is being investigated. *—AP*

1 killed, 12 injured in Mississippi shooting incident

MISSISSIPPI, 4 MARCH

One woman was killed and 12 other persons were injured in a shooting incident at a club in West Point in Mississippi in the US on Sunday (local time), CNN reported citing law enforcement officials. Clay County Sheriff Eddie Scott said that the shooting incident happened early Sunday inside Club Oasis. After the deputies reached the site, they found a 20-year-old woman dead, according to Scott. The other gunshot victims have injuries from minor to serious, with one person shot in the face. Scott said, "What we do know is that a party was advertised, and all these individuals came from other counties into our county." He added, "About 90 per cent of the partygoers were from other counties," CNN reported. Scott said the club had security and investigators do not know how a weapon was brought inside the club. *—ANI*

Afghanistan blast claims lives of 2 children, injures 4

KABUL, 4 MARCH

In a devastating incident in Paktia province, local officials have reported the loss of two children's lives and injuries to four others following the explosion of a landmine in the Hesarak district, Khaama Press reported. The tragic event unfolded on Sunday in the Khilzi Khalil area of the district, as confirmed by officials from Paktia province. Reports indicate that the landmine detonated, leading to the unfortunate deaths of two children and causing injuries to four individuals. Notably, all the victims are members of a single family, adding to the heart-wrenching impact of the incident, according to Khaama Press. Highlighting the severity of the issue, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Office previously underscored that Afghanistan stands as one of the most heavily mined and explosive-contaminated countries globally. *—ANI*

PHOTO: X/ POUYINGLUCK

Thai court drops case against ex-PM Yingluck Shinawatra

BANGKOK, 4 MARCH

A Thai court on Monday dropped a charge against former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, now living in exile, for mishandling government project expenditure in 2013. It is the latest favourable ruling in criminal cases hanging over the former leader. The court cleared Yingluck of abuse of power in December last year. The judges unanimously dismissed charges against Yingluck and five other defendants accused of mishandling 240 billion baht in the infrastructure roadshow project, according to a press release from a special body under the Supreme Court that handles criminal cases against former officeholders. Yingluck, the first female Prime Minister of Thailand and sister of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, has been living in exile since her government was toppled in a coup in 2014. *—PTI*

Pakistan's new PM Shehbaz rakes up Kashmir issue

He said assembly should pass resolution for freedom of Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD, 4 MARCH

Shehbaz Sharif took the oath as Prime Minister on Monday, taking over the reins of the country for second time since 2022 *PHOTO: PTI*

Pakistan's newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday raked up the Kashmir issue in his maiden address but pledged to improve ties with all leading nations, including the country's neighbours.

Shehbaz took the oath as Prime Minister of Pakistan on Monday, taking over the reins of the country for a second time since 2022, amidst staggering economic and security challenges faced by the country. President Arif Alvi will administer the oath to Shehbaz Sharif in a ceremony held at the President's residence in the afternoon.

"Let's all come together... and the National Assembly should pass a resolution for the freedom of the Kashmiris and Palestinians," said Shebaz. The oath-taking ceremony comes days after the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a coalition government.

Shehbaz, 72, earlier served as prime minister of a coalition government from April 2022 to August 2023 before Parliament was dissolved to hold general elections last month. Pakistan Army Chief Gen Asim Munir, caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar, chief ministers and governors of all four provinces are expected to attend the oath-taking ceremony. On Sunday, Shehbaz comfortably won a majority in the newly-elected Parliament amidst sloganeering by the Opposition.

Shehbaz, the consensus candidate of PML-N and the PPP, received 201 votes in the 336-member Parliament. His challenger Omar Ayub Khan of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) secured 92 votes.

During polls, marred by allegations of vote rigging, the Shehbaz-led party failed to garner a clear majority, albeit technically, it is the largest party with 75 out of the 265 contested seats. Shehbaz, known to be an astute politician and a good administrator, was tasked by his elder brother and former three-time prime minister to negotiate with other like-minded parties on the formation of a coalition government.

Besides the PPP, Shehbaz was backed by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P), Pakistan Muslim League (Q), Balochistan Awami Party, Pakistan Muslim League (Z), Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party and the National Party.

The new leader should make difficult decisions to undertake to reform the economy of the cash-strapped country and administration. In his first speech after being voted in, Shehbaz spoke about the struggling economy and said it would require reforms to rid the country of financial difficulties. He should also mend ties with its neighbours for peace and stability.

Former Pakistan prime minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, who is tipped to become the chairman of the Senate, has submitted his nomination papers to contest the election to be held on Friday, according to a media report on Monday. *—PTI*

FOR NEXT 6 WEEKS

US VP calls for immediate ceasefire in Gaza

US Vice President Kamala Harris has called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for next six weeks *PHOTO: X/KAMALA HARRIS*

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

US Vice President Kamala Harris has called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for at least the next six weeks, as she called on the Israeli government to "do more" to increase the flow of aid in the war-ravaged enclave.

Harris made the ceasefire call on Sunday during a speech in Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the 59th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the annual remembrance of the landmark civil rights movement.

"The threat Hamas poses to the people of Israel must be eliminated, and given the immense scale of suffering in Gaza, there must be an immediate ceasefire for at least the next six weeks, which is what is currently on the table," Harris, 59, said.

Harris on Monday is hosting a member of Israel's wartime Cabinet who is visiting Washington in defiance of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Benny Gantz, a centrist political rival of Netanyahu, is sitting down with several senior Biden administration officials this week, including Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser.

US President Joe Biden is at Camp David, the presidential retreat just outside Washington, until Tuesday. An official from Netanyahu's far-right Likud party said Gantz did not have approval from the prime minister for his meetings in Washington and that Netanyahu gave the Cabinet official a "tough talk" — underscoring the widening crack within Israel's wartime leadership nearly six months into the Israel-Hamas war.

"This will get the hostages out and get a significant amount of aid. This would allow us to build something more enduring to ensure Israel is more secure and to respect the right of the Palestinian people to dignity, freedom, and self-determination," the Indian-American leader said amidst applause from the audience.

"Hamas claims it wants a ceasefire. Well, there is a deal on the table. And as we have said, Hamas needs to agree to that deal. Let's get a ceasefire. Let's reunite the hostages with their families. And let's provide immediate relief to the people of Gaza," Harris, a Democrat, said.

Meanwhile, Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal immediately welcomed the call. *—PTI*

Haley defeats Trump in 1st Republican primary

WASHINGTON, DC (US), 4 MARCH

Former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley has defeated former US President Donald Trump in Washington DC in the Republican primary according to The Hill projections on Monday.

Haley garnered 1,274 votes to former President Trump's 676 with all precincts reporting, according to the US-based newsdaily.

The contest took place in a downtown hotel just steps away from the heart of Washington DC's lobbying hub over the weekend. According to Republican party officials, Haley carried nearly 63 per cent of the vote, Poilitico reported.

Nikki Haley's win in Washington, DC Republican primary came after Trump defeated her in caucuses in Missouri and Idaho and at a Republican convention in Michigan on Saturday.

Trump is moving towards the GOP nomination and is favoured to secure win in primaries across 16 Super Tuesday states this week.

The GOP electorate in DC, where Republicans constitute just 5 per cent of registered voters is hardly representative of the conservative base found in majority of the other parts of the US, according to Politico report.

Patrick Mara, chair of the DC Republican Party, said, "This universe is a little more sophisticated than just about any universe in any other state." He further said, "I listen to the political podcasts in the morning. I read the newsletters throughout the day. That's probably, like, half the people showing up at this."

Dan Schuberth, who runs a trade association in downtown DC and backed Haley in the primary called his fellow DC Republicans as "a pretty unique electorate," perhaps the only in the nation where many several voters personally know the people working on one or both of the campaigns. *—PTI*

CRIMEA BRIDGE CLOSED

38 Ukrainian drones intercepted in Crimea: Report

MOSCOW, 4 MARCH

Russian troops have recently made gains in Ukraine as Kyiv struggles to sustain its forces with Western-made arms *PHOTO: PTI*

A series of explosions have rocked Crimea, after a reported Ukrainian drone attack on the peninsula which was illegally annexed by Russia in 2014.

Video posted online shows a blast allegedly near a fuel depot in the south-eastern city of Feodosiya. Russian officials said 38 drones had been shot down. The Kerch bridge which connects Crimea with Russia was temporarily closed. The attack comes as Ukraine continues to urge allies to boost arms supplies.

Russian troops have recently made gains in Ukraine as Kyiv struggles to sustain its forces with Western-made arms. Moscow took control last month of the key eastern town of Avdiivka. However, according to British military intelligence, this has come at a huge cost. In its latest update, it said February had been the deadliest for the Russians since the start of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022 - with 983 killed and wounded per day. *—BBC News*

Blasts rock railway bridge in Russia, trains delayed

Moscow, 4 March

Five long-distance trains were delayed after an "explosive device detonated," and caused damage to a railway bridge near Chapayevsk in the city of Samara that lies on the Volga River in southwestern Russia state media reported on Monday. Suburban train service has been partially suspended, Russian state news agency TASS said. A blast was heard on a railway bridge across the river of Chapayevka at about 1 am GMT. The fence and bridge supports were damaged near the river bank. *—PTI*

Nepal PM forges new ties with ex-PM's party ties

KATHMANDU, 4 MAR

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Monday decided to form a new alliance with former premier KP Sharma Oli's party after terminating its nearly 15-month partnership with the Nepali Congress due to differences between the top leadership.

The alliance between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) led by Prachanda and the Sher Bahadur Deuba-led Nepali Congress has been terminated as the growing differences between the two top leaders reached a climax, a CPN-Maoist Centre party leader said.

"As (the) Nepali Congress did not cooperate with the Prime Minister, we are forced to look for (a) new alliance," Ganesh Shah, Secretary of the CPN-Maoist, told PTI.

Prachanda became the prime minister for the third term with the support of the Nepali Congress on December 25, 2022.

After breaking the alliance with the Nepali Congress --the largest party in the House of Representatives-- Prachanda joined hands with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist), led by Oli, who was regarded as Prachanda's top critic.

Last year, the CPN-UML withdrew its support to the Prachanda-led government following a rift over backing the main opposition party's candidate for the presidential poll.

The new cabinet will be formed on Monday afternoon, and the size of the cabinet will be smaller, said Surendra Pandey, Vice-chairman of the CPN-UML.

The rift between the Maoist Centre and Nepali Congress grew after differences grew between Nepali Congress leader and Finance Minister Mahat and Prachanda over the issue of budget allocation to certain projects.

The rift grew as Nepali Congress President Deuba wanted the party's senior leader and newly elected lawmaker Krishna Sitaula to be made the Chairman of the National Assembly against Prachanda's plan to appoint his party's fellow to the key post. *—PTI*

B'desh: Nobel laureate Md Yunus granted bail

DHAKA 4 MARCH

Muhammad Yunus
PHOTO: X/ YUNUS_CENTRE

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus has been granted bail by a Dhaka court in a case related to the misappropriation of over Tk25 crore from the Grameen Telecom Workers' Profit Participation Fund, as reported by Dhaka Tribune.

Senior Special Judge Ash-Shams Joglul Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan passed the order after Yunus surrendered before the court and applied for bail. According to Dhaka Tribune, Yunus's lawyer, Abdullah Al Mamun, requested bail during the hearing, while Anti-Corruption Commission lawyer Mosharraf Hossain Kajol opposed the plea. Following arguments from both sides, the court granted bail to Yunus.

The Anti-Corruption Commission had filed a charge sheet against Muhammad Yunus and 13 others on 1 February, alleging embezzlement of Tk25 crore. The case was initiated on 30 May, 2023, at the ACC's Dhaka-1 integrated office. *—PTI*

S Korea to suspend licences as crisis due to doctors' strike escalates

SEOUL, 4 MARCH

South Korea's government began steps on Monday to suspend the medical licenses of thousands of striking junior doctors, days after they missed a government-set deadline to end their joint walkouts, which have severely impacted hospital operations.

Nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents have been on strike for two weeks to protest a government push to sharply increase the number of medical school admissions. Their action has led to hundreds of cancelled surgeries and other treatments and threatened to burden the country's medical service. On Monday, officials were sent to dozens of hospitals to formally confirm the absence of the striking doctors as the government began steps to suspend their licenses for at least three months, Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo told a briefing.

Park said authorities will later notify the striking doctors of their expected license suspensions and give them a chance to respond. He suggested the license suspensions would take weeks to go into effect.

"Despite repeated appeals by the government and other parts of society, the number of trainee doctors returning to work is very insignificant. Starting from today, we begin the execution of law with the on-site inspection," Park said.

Park again repeated the government's call for the doctors to end their walkouts. "We again strongly urge them to return to patients by not ignoring the pains of patients hovering between life and death — and their families," he said. *—AP*

New US-Russian crew heads to space station

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

A SpaceX rocket carrying three US astronauts and one Russian cosmonaut has blasted off from Florida bound for the International Space Station (ISS).

They have a six-month mission, and space is one of the few areas where the US and Russia continue to co-operate closely despite the war in Ukraine. The three men and one woman are in a capsule used in space four times before by Elon Musk's SpaceX firm.

They plan to do various experiments. Their research will include growing artificial replicas of human organs to study degenerative diseases in the low-gravity environment - which is not possible on Earth. The crew blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 22:53 local time (03:53 GMT Monday).

The first launch attempt on Saturday had been called off due to strong winds. Matthew Dominick is the leader of the mission and, along with fellow American Jeanette Epps and Russian Alexander Grebenkin, is making his first flight into space. The other crew member is physician Michael Barratt, on his third visit to the ISS.

The International Space Station is a rare area of international co-operation between various global governments, and is maintained by the space agencies of Canada, Europe, Japan, the United States and Russia. *—BBC News*

4,000 INMATES FLEE

Haiti declares emergency after huge jail break

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 4 MAR

The groups aiming to oust him control around 80% of Port-au-Prince
PHOTO: X/ IDJH

- The latest upsurge in violence began on Thursday, when the prime minister travelled to Nairobi to discuss sending a Kenya-led multinational security force to Haiti

The government of Haiti declared a 72-hour state of emergency on Sunday after armed gangs stormed a major Port-au-Prince prison, leading to the killing of at least 12 people and the escape of at least 4,000 inmates.

Gang leaders say they want to force the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who is currently abroad. The groups aiming to oust him control around 80% of Port-au-Prince. Violent gang wars have killed thousands in the country since 2020.

A government statement said two prisons - one in the capital and the other in nearby Croix des Bouquets - were stormed over the weekend. It said the acts of "disobedience" were a threat to national security and said it was instituting an immediate night-time curfew in response, which started at 20:00 local time (01:00 GMT on Monday).

Among those detained in Port-au-Prince were gang members charged in connection with the 2021 killing of President Jovenel Moïse. The latest upsurge in violence began on Thursday, when the prime minister travelled to Nairobi to discuss sending a Kenya-led multinational security force to Haiti.

Gang leader Jimmy Chérizier (nicknamed "Barbecue") declared a co-ordinated attack to remove him. "All of us, the armed groups in the provincial towns and the armed groups in the capital, are united," said the former police officer, who is thought to be behind several massacres in Port-au-Prince. Haiti's police union had asked the military to help reinforce the capital's main prison, but the compound was stormed late on Saturday.

On Sunday the doors of the prison were still open and there were no signs of officers, Reuters news agency reported. Three inmates who tried to flee lay dead in the courtyard, the report said. *—ANI*

'AI advisory applicable to big firms, not start-ups'

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Government's advisory on artificial intelligence (AI) is applicable to significant players and untested platforms, and not on startups, Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said on Monday.

After a controversy over a response of Google's AI platform to queries related to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government on 1 March issued an advisory for social media and other platforms to label under-trial AI models and prevent hosting unlawful content.Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in the advisory issued to intermediaries and platforms warned of criminal action in case of non-compliance.

"Advisory is aimed at the significant platforms and permission seeking from Meity is only for large platforms and will not apply to startups. Advisory is aimed at untested AI platforms from deploying on the Indian Internet," Chandrasekhar said on X.

All digital platforms are required to ensure that the use of artificial intelligence model(s), large language models, generative AI, softwares or algorithms on or through its computer resource do not permit users to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any unlawful content.The advisory asked use of under-testing, unreliable AI models, generative AI, etc and its availability to the users on Indian Internet with the explicit permission of the government and be deployed only after appropriately labelling the possible and inherent fallibility or unreliability of the output generated.

Rajeev Chandrasekhar **PHOTO: PTI**

"Process of seeking permission, labelling and consent-based disclosure to user about untested platforms is insurance policy to platforms who can otherwise be sued by consumers. Safety and trust of India's Internet is a shared and common goal for the government, users and platforms," Chandrasekhar said.Google's AI platform Gemini made uncharitable comments about Prime Minister Modi's policies. The response of Gemini to queries about the Prime Minister led to a strong reaction from the government, with Chandrasekhar calling it a violation of IT laws. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 2 paise to settle at 82.89 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

The rupee appreciated 2 paise to settle at 82.89 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, tracking a weak American currency overseas and positive equity market sentiment.However, volatile crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows weighed on the Indian currency, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.86 and stayed in a narrow range before settling at 82.89 (provisional) against the greenback, up 2 paise from its previous close.The local unit touched a low of 82.91 during intra-day deals.On Friday, the rupee settled 2 paise lower at 82.91 against the US dollar.Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee opened higher on weak dollar and positive domestic markets. However, it lost its initial gains on reports of dollar buying by public sector banks.Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, remained unchanged at 103.79. *—PTI*

Gold remains flat at ₹64,200 per 10 grams

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Gold prices remained flat at Rs 64,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday in line with firm global trends, according to HDFC Securities.However, silver prices plunged Rs 200 to Rs 73,800 per kg, while it had ended at Rs 74,000 per kg in the previous trade."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at Rs 64,200 per 10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,084 per ounce, up by USD 2 from the previous close. Gold prices traded firm on Monday after surging nine-week high on Friday as weakness in the US data pulled the dollar and Treasury yields lower, boosting the precious metal's investment appeal, Gandhi added. *—PTI*

Godrej Properties to build 62-acre township in B'luru

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Godrej Properties Ltd on Monday said it will develop a 62-acre township in Bengaluru with an estimated revenue potential of Rs 5,000 crore.In a regulatory filing, the company informed that it has entered into definitive agreements with a land owning entity to develop a large township project in North Bengaluru under a profit-sharing model.Spread across 62 acres, the township project will offer around 5.6 million (56 lakh) square feet of saleable area comprising primarily premium residential apartments of various configurations.While an agreement for sale of land, including this 62 acres was entered into in 2014, the development wasn't able to commence at the time, the filing said.Over the past few months, the 62-acre development opportunity has crystallized, it added.Godrej Properties, expects to launch the first phase of development in the upcoming financial year. *—PTI*

Signature Global sells 1,008 flats in Gurugram

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

"Signature Global achieves phenomenal success with over Rs 3,600 crore in pre-launch sales for its luxurious 'DE LUXE-DXP' project in Gurugram, catering to the evolving aspirations of modern homebuyers. "Signature Global achieves phenomenal success with over Rs 3,600 crore in pre-launch sales for its luxurious 'DE LUXE-DXP' project in Gurugram, catering to the evolving aspirations of modern homebuyers.Realty firm Signature Global on Sunday said it has sold more than 1,000 flats in its luxury housing project in Gurugram for over Rs 3,600 crore on strong demand for residential projects.Housing demand has been very strong in the last two years, especially in the luxury homes segment.*—PTI*

Moody's raises growth forecast

6.8% rise to make India 'best' G20 nation

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

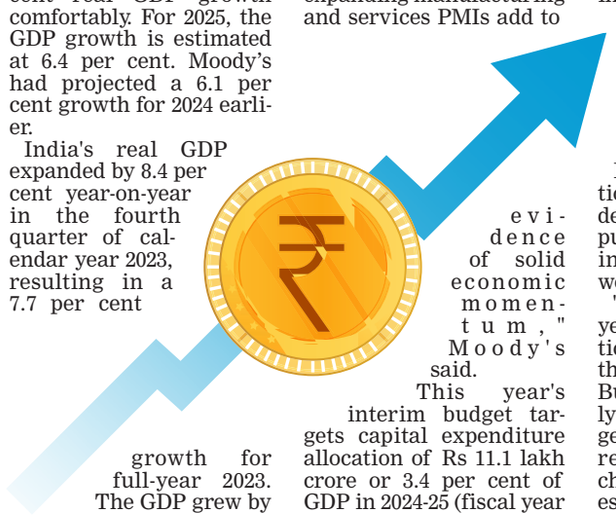
Global rating agency Moody's on Monday raised India's growth forecast for 2024 calendar year to 6.8 per cent on "stronger-than-expected" economic data and said that the country will remain the fastest growing among G20 countries.

In its Global Macroeconomic Outlook for 2024, Moody's Investors Service said with global headwinds fading, the Indian economy should be able to register 6-7 per cent real GDP growth comfortably. For 2025, the GDP growth is estimated at 6.4 per cent. Moody's had projected a 6.1 per cent growth for 2024 earlier.

India's real GDP expanded by 8.4 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of calendar year 2023, resulting in a 7.7 per cent growth for full-year 2023. The GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in the April-June quarter and by 8.1 per cent in the July-September quarter.

Capital spending by the government and strong manufacturing activity have meaningfully contributed to the robust growth outcomes in 2023, Moody's said in its report.

"Robust goods and services tax collections, rising auto sales, consumer optimism and double-digit credit growth suggest urban consumption demand remains resilient. On the supply side, expanding manufacturing and services PMIs add to evidence of solid economic momentum," Moody's said.



This year's interim budget targets capital expenditure allocation of Rs 11.1 lakh crore or 3.4 per cent of GDP in 2024-25 (fiscal year 2025), 16.9 per cent above the 2023-24 estimates.

"We expect policy continuity after the general election and continued focus on infrastructure development," Moody's said.

The agency said while private industrial capital spending has been slow to pick up, it is expected to pick up with ongoing supply chain diversification benefits and investors' response to the government's Production Linked Incentive scheme to boost key targeted manufacturing industries.

The year 2024 is an election year for several G-20 countries, including India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, the UK and the US.

Implications of elections can go beyond borders and economic and public policy in today's increasingly fractious world, it said.

"Leaders elected this year will influence domestic and foreign policies for the next four to five years. Businesses are accordingly responding to evolving geopolitical dynamics by reorganizing supply chains and capital sources," Moody's said. *—PTI*

NIFTY CLIMBS BY 27 PTS

Sensex, Nifty scale fresh record highs

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed at new record levels on Monday in a highly volatile trade driven by gains in energy and bank shares and a rally in Asian markets.

Extending its rally to the fourth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 66.14 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at an all-time high of 73,872.29. During the day, it jumped 183.98 points or 0.24 per cent to 73,990.13.

The Nifty rose by 27.20 points or 0.12 per cent to close at a lifetime high of 22,405.60 points. During the day, it hit an all-time high level of 22,440.90.

Among the Sensex firms, NTPC, Power Grid, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel and IndusInd Bank were the biggest gainers.

JSW Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement, Infosys and Titan were among the laggards **PHOTO: PTI**

JSW Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement, Infosys and Titan were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the green.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended with gains on Friday.

Global rating agency Moody's on Monday raised India's growth forecast for 2024 calendar year to 6.8 per cent, from 6.1 per cent estimated earlier, on the back of 'stronger-than-expected' economic data of 2023 and fading global economic headwinds.

In a special trading session on Saturday, the BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 60.80 points or 0.08 per cent to reach its all-time closing high of 73,806.15. The Nifty went up by 39.65 points or 0.18 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 22,378.40.

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE conducted a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on Saturday to check their preparedness to handle major disruption or failure at the primary site.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.30 per cent to USD 83.80 a barrel. *—PTI*

BluPine acquires 369 MW solar assets

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Renewable energy player BluPine Energy on Monday said it has completed the acquisition of 369 MW solar power assets from Acme Group.

It is spread across Uttarakhand, Punjab, and Karnataka and augment its total renewable capacity to 2.4 gigawatts. Neerav Nanavaty, CEO of BluPine Energy, said, "The renewable energy sector in India continues to witness remarkable growth. We have high-quality solar assets in our portfolio, further solidifying our commitment to driving positive change in India's energy sector." *—PTI*

Nokia, Sterlite Tech to collaborate

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Finnish telecom and IT company Nokia on Monday said it has partnered with Sterlite Technologies (STL), an optical and digital solutions company, to enhance networking and digital solutions for government institutions and enterprises.

The partnership will also focus on government-driven connectivity projects to offer connectivity and networking solutions, Nokia said in a statement.

"The collaboration will accelerate the Industry 4.0 revolution. By leveraging these solutions, businesses can gain a competitive edge and drive transformation with disruptive technologies," the statement said.

Both companies will strengthen enterprise networks, providing high-speed, high availability, low-latency connections for applications such as 5G, IoT (Internet of Things), data centre interconnect, supply chain efficiency, real-time data analytics, and generative AI use cases, according to the statement.

"STL's extensive experience in connectivity solutions, coupled with Nokia's technological strength in 5G and IoT, creates a synergy that has the potential to redefine enterprise connectivity and transform industries. Together, we envision empowering enterprises to reach their full potential," said Praveen Cherian, CEO of Global Services Business at STL.

Head of Enterprise and Webscale business in India at Nokia Vinish Bawa said the alliance is well-positioned to redefine enterprise connectivity in India. *—PTI*

India to export 30K tonnes of non-basmati rice

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The government has permitted exports of 30,000 tonne of non-basmati white rice to Tanzania and 80,000 tonne of broken rice to Djibouti and Guinea Bissau.

The export is permitted through National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification.

Though exports of non-basmati white rice have been banned since 20 July, 2023 to boost domestic supply, exports are allowed on the basis of permission granted by the government to certain countries to meet their food security needs on request.

Tanzania is an East African nation, while Djibouti is at the north-east coast of the African continent.

Guinea-Bissau is a tropical country in West Africa. According to the notification, exports of 30,000 tonne of broken rice are allowed to Djibouti and 50,000 tonne to Guinea Bissau.

India has earlier also allowed these exports to countries like Nepal, Cameroon, Cote D' Ivore, Guinea, Malaysia, Philippines, and Seychelles. *—PTI*

TO UAE & BANGLADESH

While export of 50,000 tonnes of onion is permitted to Bangladesh, shipments of 14,400 tonnes were allowed to the UAE **PHOTO: PTI**

India to export 64 tonnes of onion

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

- **On 8 December last year, the government banned exports of onion till 31 March this year with a view to increase domestic availability and to keep prices in check**

Government has permitted exports of 64,400 tonnes of onion to the UAE and Bangladesh through the National Cooperative Exports Ltd (NCEL), according to notifications of the commerce ministry.

While export of 50,000 tonnes of onion is permitted to Bangladesh, shipments of 14,400 tonnes were allowed to the UAE.

"Export of 14,400 tonnes of onions, with a quantity ceiling of 3,600 MT (metric tonnes) quarterly, to UAE through NCEL is notified," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification.

DGFT is an arm of the commerce ministry, which deals with norms related to imports and exports.

For exports to Bangladesh, it said that the modalities for the exports will be worked out by the NCEL in consultation with the department of consumer affairs.

Though onion exports are banned, the government allows specified quantities to friendly nations.

The exports are allowed on the basis of permission granted by the government to other countries based on their request.

On 8 December last year, the government banned exports of onion till 31 March this year with a view to increase domestic availability and to keep prices in check.

Earlier, the Centre in October 2023 had decided to step up the sale of buffer onion stock at a subsidised rate of Rs 25 per kg in retail markets in order to provide relief to consumers.

Between 1 April, 2023 and 4 August, 2023 this fiscal, 9.75 lakh tonnes of onions have been exported from the country. The top three importing countries in value terms are Bangladesh, Malaysia and the UAE. *—PTI*

Lighthouse invests ₹229 crore in Safari

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

Private equity fund Lighthouse on Monday said it has invested Rs 229 crore in luggage brand Safari for an undisclosed stake.

The investment by the mid-market consumer and healthcare-focused platform is the second bet taken by its newest fund, Lighthouse India Fund IV AIF, as per an official statement.

Lighthouse's co-founder and partner Sachin Bhartiya said the Private Equity (PE) fund sees structural tailwinds to the travel sector, and added that the Indian luggage market has been a beneficiary of increasing leisure travel and wedding spends.

Safari's Chairman and Managing Director Sudhir Jatia said the luggage market still remains "highly unorganised" and his company aims to penetrate deeper into the Indian mark *—PTI*

Influenza is a highly contagious acute respiratory illness caused by viruses **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Cadila launches Tetra vaccine for influenza

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Cadila Pharmaceuticals on Monday said it has launched a vaccine to prevent influenza, a recurrent and widespread viral infection. The drug firm has introduced quadrivalent Cadiflu Tetra vaccine which has been approved by the DCGI (Drugs Controller General of India) for use in adults and children. The new vaccine targets four strains of the influenza virus subtype A and B, responsible for seasonal epidemics, the drug firm said in a statement.

Developed using proprietary technology employing nano-sized particles, the vaccine mimics the external structure of the virus without containing intact genetic material, it added."This breakthrough in vaccine development also holds promise for enhancing the protection of pregnant women against influenza, contributing to the overall well-being of both mother and child," Cadila Pharmaceuticals CMD Rajiv I Modi said.

Influenza, is a highly contagious acute respiratory illness caused by viruses. *—PTI*

IN STAINLESS STEEL SECTOR

Scindia inaugurates first green hydrogen plant

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Union Minister of Civil Aviation & Steel, Jyotiraditya M Scindia, addressed a gathering at the inauguration of India's first green hydrogen plant within the stainless steel sector in a landmark moment for India's industrial landscape.

The inauguration ceremony marked a milestone in India's journey towards sustainable industrial practices, with the Jindal Stainless' Green Hydrogen project paving the way for a greener, eco-friendlier future.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Minister Scindia expressed his immense pleasure at inaugurating the first green hydrogen plant, which symbolizes the collaborative efforts of two innovative powerhouses, Jindal Stainless and Hygiene Co.

He emphasized the pivotal role played by this project in not only revolutionizing the steel sector in India but also setting a benchmark for sustainable practices across the globe.

Scindia said, "It gives me tremendous pleasure to inaugurate this first green hydrogen plant which is a coming together of two innovative Park baking firms in the form of Jindal stainless and hygiene co steering the path for the steel sector not only within India but in many ways across the world".

Jyotiraditya Scindia **PHOTO: PTI**

Reflecting on the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Minister Scindia highlighted the resilience demonstrated by nations worldwide in overcoming this adversity.

He underscored the importance of reinvigorating trade, commerce, and economies as the world emerges from the pandemic, with a focus on generating employment opportunities and improving the quality of life for people globally.

Drawing inspiration from Prime Minister Modi's vision for India, Minister Scindia emphasized the importance of seizing opportunities in critical sectors such as the national green hydrogen mission, semiconductors, drones, and others.

Minister Scindia further emphasized the pivotal role of the steel sector in India's journey towards becoming a dominant global economic power.He highlighted India's current status as the fifth-largest economy and projected its ascent to surpass Germany and Japan within the next three to four years, solidifying its position as the third-largest economy globally.

The inauguration of India's first green hydrogen plant within the stainless steel sector represents a significant leap forward in India's quest for sustainable development and economic growth. *—ANI*

Dhoni drops hint at a 'new role' ahead of IPL 2024

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Former India skipper MS Dhoni who led Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to their fifth IPL title hinted at a "new role" ahead of the upcoming season. Dhoni took to Facebook and expressed his excitement about the upcoming season and dropped a hint about his "new role" leaving fans speculating about what Dhoni could be referring to. "Can't wait for the new season and the new 'role'. Stay tuned," Dhoni posted on Facebook. Dhoni has had one of the most inspiring journeys in sports history. From working as a ticket collector at a railway station, he transformed into India's biggest trophy collector, leading the team to the ICC T20 World Cup 2007, ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 and ICC Champions Trophy 2013 as skipper. Dhoni has led CSK to five IPL titles in 2010, 2011, 2018, 2021 and 2023. Dhoni has also led CSK to two CLT20 titles in 2010 and 2014. With this, he is not only the most successful captain in franchise cricket as well, but cricket in general. *—ANI*

Jaismine crashes out of Olympic Boxing Qualifier

BUSTO ARSIZIO, 4 MAR

India's dismal run at the first World Olympic Boxing Qualifier continued as Commonwealth Games medallist Jaismine Lamboria made an opening round exit here. Jaismine, 22, who won a bronze medal at the 2022 Birmingham CWG, lost by a 0-5 unanimous verdict to Japan's Ayaka Taguchi in the women's 60kg round of 64 late on Sunday. Earlier on Sunday, Deepak Bhoria (51kg) and Narender Berwal (+92kg) also crashed out of the tournament, losing their respective opening rounds. Six Indian boxers are still in the fray for earning Paris Olympic quotas. National champion Lakshya Chahar will begin his campaign late Monday night. He will take on 2021 Asian silver medallist Meysam Gheshlaghi of Iran. *—PTI*

Stand Up-Paddling: Men's, Women's World No 2 to take part

MANGALURU, 4 MARCH

Men's and Women's World No 2, Spanish Stand-Up Paddlers Fernando Perez and Esperanza Barreras will be the highlight among the strong line-up that will vie for the top honours in the upcoming India Paddle Festival, India's first-ever international Stand-Up Paddling Event. India's challenge will be spearheaded by the formidable Sekar Patchai, the reigning national champion along with Manikandan D and Akash J Shetty. The India Paddle Festival is scheduled to take place at the picturesque Sasihithlu Beach, Mangaluru, Karnataka, from March 8 to March 10 and will be conducted before the launch of the 2024 APP World Tour. The three-day international event is sanctioned by the Association of PaddleSurf Professionals World Tour, the official professional World Championship Tour for the sport of Stand-Up Paddling. *—ANI*

Seven Indians in fray at USKG Malaysian C'ships

KUALA LUMPUR, 4 MARCH

Seven Indians will feature in the US Kids Golf Malaysian Championship 2024, which will be one of the numerous events on the Asian circuit of the US Kids Series. A total of 106 junior golfers from 16 countries, including 37 players from Malaysia, will be competing in the three-day tournament. The seven Indians in the fray are Ruslaan Alam Khan and Divjot Gupta in Boys 8 and Under; Jot Sarup Gupta in Boys 10 and Under; and three boys Arshvant Srivastava, Ved Sai Machiraju and Sohang Har Kantor in Boys 13-14. The lone Indian girl golfer in the fray will be Kriti Parekh of Conoor in Girls 13-14. *—ANI*

Barca, Girona fail to take edge of Madrid's stumble

Barcelona was held 0-0 at Athletic Bilbao in Spanish league

MADRID, 4 MARCH

Barcelona and Girona failed to take advantage of Real Madrid's stumble in the Spanish league.

Defending champion Barcelona was held 0-0 at Athletic Bilbao on Sunday, while Girona lost 1-0 at Mallorca. The Catalan clubs missed their chance to make up ground on league leader Madrid, which drew 2-2 at Valencia on Saturday. The weekend's results meant that Madrid increased its lead over second-place Girona to seven points and stayed eight points ahead of third-place Barcelona.

Fourth-place Atletico Madrid did cut into Madrid's lead with a 2-1 win over Real Betis, though Diego Simeone's team remained in fourth place and 11 points behind its city rival after 27 matches.

Barcelona lost two of its top players because of injuries, with Pedri and Frenkie De Jong having to be replaced before half-time in Bilbao.

Athletic remained in fifth place, five points behind the last Champions League place. Before the match, the club paid tribute to a fan who died after suffering a stroke during the Copa del Rey match against Atletico on Thursday. It was an even match at San Mamés Stadium, with each team having only two attempts on target. João Cancelo and Robert Lewandowski had some of the most significant chances for Barcelona.

"We didn't play a good match," Barcelona coach Xavi Hernández said. "It's a missed opportunity. We could have done better." The coach said the early injuries affected his team. De Jong left the match in the 26th minute after twisting his ankle, while Pedri appeared to hurt a leg muscle in the 45th.

"These are injuries to two very important players, it's unfortunate," Xavi said. "We are sad because it seems that they will be out for several matches."

Atletico rebounded from being eliminated by Athletic in the semifinals of the Copa del Rey to strengthen its grip on fourth place. It was only the second win in eight matches for Diego Simeone's team, which also lost to Inter Milan in the first leg of the round of 16 of the Champions League, and to Sevilla in the Spanish league.

The victory at the Metropolitano Stadium left Atletico three points behind Barcelona and four points behind Girona. "We are on the right track," Simeone said. "We've been doing things well and hopefully this win will give us a boost." *—AP*

Vini Jr and Bellinghum celebrate after team scored a goal against Valencia in Mestalla stadium on Sunday in Spanish league title **PHOTO: X/ REAL MADRID**

PATH TO SANTOSH TROPHY SF

Services serve Railways 2-0 defeat

ITANAGAR, 4 MARCH

Six-time champions Services sailed into the semifinals of the Santosh Trophy with a comfortable 2-0 win over Railways at the Golden Jubilee Stadium here on Monday.

Forced to play second fiddle for most of the match against a rampaging Services, the Railwaymen were swept off their feet as early as in the ninth minute when a foul in the area allowed their opponents to take the lead through a penalty converted by Shafeel PP. Another goal came almost at the stroke of halftime when a brilliant effort by Samir Mumru saw Services increase their lead.

That Services, who made the semi-finals in the last edition too, were the better team on the pitch was clear from the very beginning.

Services received a penalty after Railways' Nitesh Kumar Yadav challenged midfielder Rahul Ramakrishnan. Defender Shafeel, who stepped in to take the spot kick, had the goalkeeper Raja Barman beaten convincingly on the right, but the referee ordered the kick to be retaken as one of the Services players rushed inside the box even before the shot was taken.

Unperturbed, Shafeel slammed the ball in once again, this time on the left. Services created trouble for the rival defenders from the left. The Railways defence looked harassed and managed to survive till the 45th minute. However, they had no answer to the goal scored by Samir Murmu, which was a spectacular effort. Latching on to the ball on the right, Murmu took an angular shot that entered the goal. *—PTI*

Jaiswal among ICC Men's Player of the Month

Dubai, 4 March

Prolific India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, the leading run-scorer in the ongoing Test series against England, has been nominated for ICC Men's Player of the Month Award for February alongside New Zealand's Kane Williamson and Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka. "The International Cricket Council (ICC) revealed the shortlists of nominees for the ICC Men's and Women's Player of the Month awards for February 2024," the ICC said in a release on Monday. "Several high stakes battles took place last month in the ICC World Test Championship (WTC), and among the contenders for the ICC Men's Player of the Month prize are two premier run-scorers in the longest format, plus a record-breaking ODI batter from Sri Lanka." Jaiswal has been nominated for the first time in the ICC Player of the Month awards following a sensational month in Tests against England. So far, the left-hander has scored 655 runs from four Tests with a match to go. The 22-year-old scored back-to-back double hundreds in Visakhapatnam and Rajkot to help India overturn a 0-1 deficit against England and win three Tests on the bounce. *—PTI*

RCB WINS HOME FIXTURE

Royal Challengers Bangalore's Asha Sobana celebrates with teammates the wicket of UP Warriorz batter Deepti Sharma during the Women's Premier League. Royal Challengers Bangalore finished their home leg in style winning their reverse fixture against UP Warriorz by 23 runs **PHOTO: PTI**

Inzamam questions PCB's decision to remove Hafeez

KARACHI, 4 MARCH

Former Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq has criticised the country's cricket board for removing Muhammed Hafeez as Team Director due to recent poor results, asserting that it is unfair to "target" ex-players in administrative roles when officials are refusing to shoulder any responsibility for the side's performance.

The PCB had last month parted ways with Hafeez after a 0-3 Test defeat in Australia followed by a 1-4 T20 International series loss to New Zealand.

Hafeez's contract, initially short-term, concluded after the T20 series in New Zealand, following the sports ministry's recommendation against a long-term agreement.

"Can someone explain the reasoning behind removing Muhammad Hafeez as team director but retaining Wahab Riaz as chief selector after the Australian and New Zealand tours?" Inzamam said on a TV show. "Weren't both appointed at same time and given same responsibilities so why has only Hafeez been held accountable and not Wahab Riaz?" he asked.

The former cricket great, who resigned as chief selector in acrimonioVus circumstances during last year's World Cup, also urged the PCB to start respecting players. "The PCB Chairman no doubt is a highly respectable position but don't former captains and stalwarts deserve the same amount of respect from the top board officials," said Inzamam.

Inzamam alleged that during his dispute with the Board over conflict of interest allegations, he was shown no respect by former PCB Chairman Zaka Ashraf.

"We had a meeting scheduled at the PCB offices after this story about me having a conflict of interest as chief selector broke out.

"I was sitting with (PCB officials) Salman Naseer and Aliya Rasheed waiting for the chairman to come," he recalled. *—PTI*

Former Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq **PHOTO: AP**

CHRISTIAN HORNER

Controversy 'driving team apart': Jos Verstappen

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

Christian Horner's leadership has been cast into fresh doubt after racing driver Max Verstappen's father, Jos, claimed Red Bull is "in danger of being torn apart" if the under-fire team principal remains in his role.

A defiant Horner said on Saturday night that he is "absolutely confident" he will stay on as Red Bull boss for the remainder of the Formula One season after overseeing Verstappen lead a one-two finish from teammate Sergio Perez at the opening round in Bahrain. Horner's job has faced intense scrutiny in recent weeks following misconduct allegations made against him by a female colleague. Horner has always denied the claims.

However, Jos Verstappen, Max's father and a retired racing driver, claimed "there is tension" in the Red Bull team in comments he made to the Daily Mail newspaper after the race. "The team is in danger of being torn apart. It can't go on the way it is. It will explode. He is playing the victim, when he is the one causing the problems," he said.

During an extraordinary week in Bahrain, Horner was exonerated by Red Bull Racing parent's company, Red Bull GmbH, following an internal probe into allegations of "inappropriate behaviour". But hundreds of WhatsApp messages, appearing to be exchanged between Horner and the complainant, were then leaked to the F1 world.

Jos, 51, the father of Red Bull's three-time world champion, has denied reports that he is trying orchestrate Horner's ouster. "That wouldn't make sense," he said. "Why would I do that when Max is doing so well here?"

Horner strode hand in hand with wife Geri Halliwell in the paddock one hour and 45 minutes before Saturday's race.

The authenticity of the file, which was sent from a generic email account, has not been verified by The Associated Press.

Jos Verstappen, a former F1 driver who was Michael Schumacher's teammate when they raced at Benetton, has been pointed to as a potential source of the file by some F1 insiders but he firmly denied it. *—Al Jazeera*

Red Bull team principal Christian Horner during the Formula One Bahrain Grand Prix **PHOTO: AP**

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RANJI TROPHY

Vidarbha's batter Yash Rathod and Akshay Wadkar run between the wickets during the third day of the semi-final **PHOTO: ANI**

Rathod's 97 helps Vidarbha to fight against MP

NAGPUR, 4 MARCH

A spunky unbeaten 97 by Yash Rathod helped Vidarbha script a superb fightback and reach 343 for six in their second innings against Madhya Pradesh on the third day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Monday.

Rathod, who faced 165 balls, received excellent support from his captain Akshay Wadkar (77, 139b) and the pair added 158 runs for the stubborn sixth wicket stand as the hosts recovered from a shaky 161 for five. Vidarbha, now, lead by a handy 261 runs. The first hint of resistance came when Dhruv Shorey (40, 65b) and Aman Mokhade (59, 100b) made 84 runs for the third wicket after Vidarbha lost night-watchman Akshay Wakhare in the second over of the day after resuming from 13 for one.

However, left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya broke the alliance when he induced an edge from Shorey to press Himanshu Mantri into action behind the stumps. Vidarbha were 90 for three then, and from there they lost Mokhade and Karun Nair (38) to be at 161 for five and a mere 79 runs ahead.

But Rathod, who is playing in only his seventh First-Class game, and Wadkar built a wall against the waves of MP attack. The pitch too seemed to have eased out a lot more compared to the first two days, with the bounce getting low and slow.

Both Rathod and Wadkar exploited the conditions to the hilt to pile runs without much alarm as MP bowlers looked ragged. However, Wadkar fell towards the end of the day to pacer Anubhav Agarwal. Wadkar's loose drive away from the body was taken at second slip by a diving substitute fielder Sumit Kushwah. *—PTI*

Wankhede to host final this season

Mumbai, 4 March

The Ranji Trophy final of this season will be played at the Wankhede Stadium here from March 10 to 14, the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) informed on Monday. The announcement of the venue for the title clash was made after the 41-time champions Mumbai qualified for the final for the 48th time. "The Wankhede Stadium has been the home of Mumbai cricket for almost half-a-century. So, considering the legacy of the tournament and the importance of such a big game for the whole Mumbai cricket community, it is fitting that the final is played at the Wankhede (Stadium)," MCA secretary Ajinkya Naik said in a statement. Mumbai defeated Tamil Nadu by an innings and 70 runs in a one-side semifinal here at the BKC ground on Monday to enter the summit match after a gap of one season. Mumbai will face the winner between Vidarbha and Madhya Pradesh, who are engaged in the other semifinal clash at the VCA Ground in Nagpur. *—PTI*

MY 100TH TEST CAP IS FOR MY MOTHER: JONNY BAIRSTOW

DHARAMSALA, MAR 4

Set to achieve a major milestone of playing his 100th Test this week, England wicketkeeper-batter Jonny Bairstow dedicated the achievement to his cancer-survivor mother who has been his driving force and kept the family together through the difficult times.

The 34-year-old will become the 17th Englishman to win 100th Test cap when he steps out for the fifth and final Test against India starting here on Thursday and it will be an emotional week for Bairstow'.

"When I play, there are times I think about Dad. But I think more about how hard Mum worked to make sure we were OK after everything that happened. To keep us together as a family. That has been my driving force," he told 'Telegraph Sport'. *—PTI*

Men's, women's TT teams qualify for Olympics

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Indian men's and women's teams on Monday scripted history as they qualified for the Olympics for the first time ever based on their world rankings.

After the conclusion of the World Team Championships Finals in Busan last month, which served as the last qualifying event for the Paris Olympics, seven spots in the team events remained, which have been awarded to sides based on their rankings. "The highest-ranked teams not yet qualified in the latest World Team Ranking booked their ticket to Paris 2024," ITTF said. In the women's event, India, ranked 13, Poland (12), Sweden (15), and Thailand have secured their passage to Paris.

While Croatia (12), India (15), and Slovenia (11) have secured their spots in the men's team event. "Finally!!!! India qualifies for the team event at the Olympics! Something I have wanted for a long long time! This one is truly special, despite it being my fifth appearance at the Olympics! Kudos to our Women's Team who also secure a historical quota!" veteran Sharath Kamal tweeted.

This marks a significant milestone for Indian table tennis history, as it will be the first time the nation competes in the team event at the Olympics since its inception at the Beijing 2008 Games. *—PTI*

Indian Men's and Women's team **PHOTO: X**

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